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FAMOUS PLAYS
of 1933-1934

UNIFORM EACH 7/6

FAMOUS PLAYS OF 1933

THE LATE CHRISTOPHER BEAN
RICHARD OF BORDEAUX
TEN MINUTE ALIBI
SOMETIMES EVEN NOW
ALIEN CORN OF THEE I SING

FAMOUS PLAYS OF 1932-33

CHILDREN IN UNIFORM
MIRACLE AT VERDUN SERVICE
STRANGE ORCHESTRA
BEHOLD WE LIVE COUNSELLOR AT LAW

FAMOUS PLAYS OF 1932

MUSICAL CHAIRS SOMEBODY KNOWS
SEE NAPLES AND DIE
THE ROSE WITHOUT A THORN
THERE S ALWAYS JULIET
ONCE IN A LIFETIME

FAMOUS PLAYS OF 1931

THE BARRETTS OF WIMPOLE STREET
THE IMPROPER DUCHESS
TO SEE OURSELVES AFTER ALL
LONDON WALL AUTUMN CROCUS

FAMOUS PLAYS OF TO DAY

JOURNEY S END YOUNG WOODLEY
MANY WATERS THE LADY WITH A LAMP
SUCH MEN ARE DANGEROUS
MRS MOONLIGHT

SIX PLAYS

THE GREEN PASTURES STREET SCENE
BADGER S GREEN DOWN OUR STREET
SOCRATES ALISON S HOUSE

FAMOUS PLAYS OF 1933 - 1934

CLIVE OF INDIA

W P LIPSCOMB AND R J MINNEY

THE WIND AND THE RAIN

MERTON HODGE

REUNION IN VIENNA

ROBERT E SHERWOOD

THE LAUGHING WOMAN

GORDON DAVIOT

SIXTEEN

AIMÉE AND PHILIP STUART

THE DISTAFF SIDE

JOHN VAN DRUTEN

LONDON
VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD
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CLIVE OF INDIA

W P Lipscomb and R J Minney

CLIVE OF INDIA

A Play
In Three Acts

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and Rubeigh James Minney
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*Applications for Amateur Performances may be made
in writing to W P Lipscomb, 3 Adelphi Terrace,
London, W C 2*

FOREWORD

CLIVE has suffered considerably at the hands of the historians. We have not attempted to 'whitewash' him—there is no need. But neither need we accept blindly the verdict of the historians. With all his faults—and he was very blunt, rude, unscrupulous on occasion, and not without a touch of vulgarity in his love of ostentation—he still remains a great and very likeable person.

We will give just a few examples of the way historians, copying mistakes from one another, have misrepresented Clive.

The Gift from Mir Jaffar

With regard to the large gift of money Clive accepted from Mir Jaffar, the man he elevated to a throne, it should be borne in mind that the East India Company gave him, as they gave every member in their employ, full leave to make what money they could. This had been sanctioned and sanctified by custom for no less than a hundred and fifty years before Clive came to India. Every merchant in the Company had received gifts and made personal profit. Lord Chatham's grandfather, Thomas Pitt, had himself been an Eastern adventurer. He went so far as to defy the East India Company by becoming an interloper and cutting into their trading rights. He made such vast sums of money for himself that he brought back the famous diamond, since known as the Pitt

diamond, which he sold to the Duc d'Orleans, Regent of France, for over £100,000

Clive was condemned, sixteen years after his acceptance of this gift had been approved by all, because he had the courage to put a stop to the plundering indulged in by employees of the East India Company. What he had received was a free gift for services rendered to his Company as well as to India, but theirs was merely an orgy of grab—they snatched all they could seize. Clive was so angry when he heard of this that he left the ease and retirement of his country house and went back to India, at his own expense very largely, in order to purge the country. He did. But the men he drove out bought up seats in Parliament with their ill-gotten gains, and prepared a rod in pickle for his homecoming.

The Suicide "

Again, it is inexplicable that without evidence our history books should continue to assert that Clive committed suicide. They state that he cut his throat. That is not true. He died of an overdose of opium, a drug he had been taking for some time in order to alleviate pain. Actually, on that day, he was setting out for Bath to take the waters. The coach was at the door of his magnificent house in Berkeley Square, and he was dressing when an acute attack of the pain made him seek once more the solace of the drug. He was heard to fall. Servants rushed into his room, and found him dead. The newspapers announcing his death, definitely stated that he "died of an overdose of opium unwittingly taken."

The Treacherous Omichand

Clive has been censured for forging Admiral Watson's signature on a bogus treaty made to hoodwink that grasping Oriental scoundrel Omichand. No one has ever attempted to deny the cunning and treachery of Omichand. In the hour of crisis, Clive resorted to any means to outwit the fellow, in order to save the lives of thousands. Admiral Watson, when informed later of the forgery, raised not the slightest objection.

Macaulay was wrong in his portrait of Omichand, whom he describes as a Bengalee, whereas Omichand came from the Punjab, which lies a thousand miles from Bengal. Omichand (Macaulay also said), on discovering, after Plassey, that he was not to receive the guaranteed sum of money, lost his reason, and died within a month or two.

Actually, a year after Plassey, Omichand was still alive, and causing fresh anxiety to Clive and Warren Hastings. Scouts had to be despatched "to locate him, and apprehend him wherever they can meet him." It was an ironic gesture that, at his death, Omichand should have thought it meet to bequeath a part of his wealth to the London Foundling Hospital.

If for no other reason, we must remember Clive for one great thing. Up to this time, the Spanish, Dutch, French, Portuguese—indeed all the colonisers—had but one idea—to get rich quickly by any method possible, and we know to some extent how ruthless those methods were. Clive was the first man to advocate openly that if you come into a country as a conqueror you must give as well as take. His view was that

if we accept the responsibilities of India, we must give them colour by governing for the benefit, not only of ourselves, but of the people of that country

Nobody listened Even Chatham himself, though he agreed in principle, said it was only a dream How much of it is still a dream, and how much has been realised already, we must leave you to decide

In the play, we ask you to see the history of the times through the eyes of the two chief characters—Clive and Margaret Their romance is historically true It is the story of any man and any woman, wherein the man is for ever rushing off to conquer new worlds, and the woman is always tugging at his sleeve and reminding him of his promise to settle down quietly with her and her children

CHARACTERS

(in order of their appearance)

MILLER	}	Clerks of the East India Company
JOHNSON		
STRINGER		
VINCENT		
EDMUND MASKEIYNE		
MR KENT	}	Rich East India merchants
MR PEMBERTON		
ROBERT CLIVE		
THE GOVERNOR		
MR WARBURTON	}	Councillors of the East India Company
MR MANNING		
SERGEANT CLARK		
MARGARET MASKELYNE		
AYAH		
LADY STANLEY		
LORD DALMAYNE		
ST AUBYN		
LADY LINLEY		
MRS NIXON		
SIR KYNASTON FRITH		A physician
MRS CLIFFORD		Housekeeper
MR WALSH		Clive's secretary
MIR JAFFAR		Commander in Chief of Suraj ud Dowlah's Army
OMICHAND		An Indian financier
ADMIRAL WATSON		
MAJOR KILPATRICK		
CAPTAIN JOHNSTONE		
AN OLD INDIAN WOMAN		
MR WEDDERBURN		
CAPTAIN GEORGE		
BETTY		A maid
GEORGE		A farm bailiff
A SURVEYOR		
SIR GEORGE HUNTER		
LORD CHATHAM		
BUTLER		
HOUSEKEEPER		
MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT		

SCENES

ACT I

SCENE I Verandah of a club in Fort St David 1748

SCENE II The council room, Fort St David
Three years later

SCENE III Maskelyne's quarters A few
months later

ACT II

SCENE I Clive's house in Queen's Square,
London Three years later 1755

SCENE II Clive's quarters in Calcutta Two
years later

SCENE III A Hut overlooking the river across
Plassey One month later

ACT III

SCENE I Clive's country house at Walcot
Seven years later 1764

SCENE II A corridor in the House of Com
mons Nine years later

SCENE III Clive's house in Queen's Square
The same night

First produced in the West End at Wyndham's Theatre, on January 25th, 1934, with the following cast

<i>Miller</i>	DOUGLAS BLANDFORD
<i>Johnson</i>	BASIL MOSS
<i>Stringer</i>	RAYMOND HUNTLEY
<i>Vincent</i>	ROY GRAHAM
<i>Edmund Maskelyne</i>	DEERING WELLS
<i>Mr Kent</i>	VINCENT HOLMAN
<i>Mr Pemberton</i>	GEORGE H BISHOP
<i>Robert Clive</i>	LESLIE BANKS
<i>The Governor</i>	LOUIS GOODRICH
<i>Mr Warburton</i>	DONOVAN MAULE
<i>Mr Manning</i>	PAUL GILL
<i>Sergeant Clark</i>	HENRY CAINE
<i>Margaret Maskelyne</i>	GILLIAN LIND
<i>Ayah</i>	EVELYN MOORE
<i>Lady Stanley</i>	KATHLEEN BOUTALL
<i>Lord Dalmayne</i>	SHAPLAND COWPER
<i>St Aubyn</i>	ROY GRAHAM
<i>Lady Linley</i>	WINIFRED EVANS
<i>Mrs Nixon</i>	ROSAMOND GREENWOOD
<i>Sir Kynaston Frith</i>	T RENAURD LOCKWOOD
<i>Mrs Clifford</i>	BUENA BENT
<i>Mr Walsh</i>	DOUGLAS BLANDFORD
<i>Mir Jaffar</i>	W E HOLLOWAY
<i>Omichand</i>	PHILIP LEAVER
<i>Admiral Watson</i>	FRANK PETLEY
<i>Major Kilpatrick</i>	RAYMOND HUNTLEY
<i>Captain Johnstone</i>	BASIL MOSS
<i>An old Indian Woman</i>	KATHLEEN BOUTALL
<i>Mr Wedderburn</i>	LEO GENN
<i>Captain George</i>	SHAPLAND COWPER

<i>Betty</i>	JANE GRAHAME
<i>George</i>	JULIAN ANDREWS
<i>A Surveyor</i>	CARLTON BROUGH
<i>Sir George Hunter</i>	PAUL GILL
<i>Lord Chatham</i>	W E HOLLOWAY
<i>Butler</i>	T RENAURD LOCKWOOD
<i>Housekeeper</i>	EVELYN MOORE

The play produced by CAMPBELL GULLAN

Clive of India was licensed by the Lord Chamberlain to the Village Players of Great Hucklow in the County of Derbyshire in March 1933 These amateur players gave the first performance of this play on any stage The play has also been performed at the Theatre Royal Windsor and at Manchester by the Manchester Repertory Company

ACT I

SCENE I

The scene is the verandah of the club room at Fort St David, Southern India, 1748

The verandah is slightly raised from the ground, and at the back of the stage are steps leading down to the pathway outside

Several poor clerks are sitting about the verandah. Some are trying to play cards in spite of the heat, others are in a state of considerable dejection. They look shabby and worn.

A contrast comes when the senior merchants arrive outside with umbrella bearers and bodyguard and walk through the outer club room with great dignity. The moment a merchant comes in all the clerks stand to attention and run to help him, and wait for a word with him.

MILLER, one of the clerks, has just finished re-counting the scene of a duel. JOHNSON is sitting back and looking at the others as if disbelieving. They are huddled together, whispering excitedly.

JOHNSON Well, it seems incredible !

MILLER I tell you I was there. I saw it all.

JOHNSON Well, all I can say is that he is a lucky devil.

[STRINGER, a big surly fellow, comes up to the group. He is the bully, but is just as servile when the merchants come in.]

STRINGER What's all this ?

JOHNSON Miller's been telling us about young Clive's duel last night.

STRINGER Oh ? Has somebody killed him ?

MILLER No.

STRINGER Pity. What was it about ?

MILLER He called a man a cheat.

STRINGER Did he ? Who was it ?

JOHNSON Carpenter, of all people.

STRINGER And Carpenter didn't kill him ?

MILLER They arranged the duel in the room
Clive fired first and his bullet went wide——

STRINGER And ?

MILLER Carpenter reserved his fire He came
right up to Clive, put the pistol to his head,
and said, " Now am I a cheat ? "

JOHNSON (*joining in*) And, according to Miller,
the young idiot said, " I still say you cheated—
shoot and be damned ! "

MILLER (*nodding*) Yes, he did It was terrible

JOHNSON And so the great bully thought a
second, threw the pistol down, and went out,
saying, " The man is mad "

STRINGER H'm ! Missed his chance I would
have pulled the trigger

[VINCENT, *a small, weedy fellow with a precise
and mincing manner, shakes his head*

VINCENT Oh, I wouldn't go as far as *that*

STRINGER (*turning on him*) Oh, you wouldn't ?
Well, I would Damn moody, sullen young
upstart

JOHNSON Thinks himself too good for his work
out here

MILLER Do you know, he had the face to go
to the Governor himself and tell him that the
conditions of the clerks in the East India
Company were all out of date

STRINGER Impertinence

VINCENT (*precise*) Well, I don't know , in some
ways I think he is right

STRINGER (*snarling at him*) Oh, you do ? Very
interesting

VINCENT Well, how can anyone be expected
to live on five pounds a year ?

STRINGER (*angrily*) Well, anyway, is it for a
young fellow like Clive to start questioning the

conditions ? He has only been out here a year or so—and a year too long at that

[A rich merchant, KENT, appears outside, with umbrella bearer and bodyguard You hear him say "Acha," with a nod to the bearer, who salaams deeply and says, 'Hozoor']

The hookah wallah, watching from the corner of verandah, rushes to KENT with hookah KENT glares at him, tries the hookah

The clerks at once stop talking and rise deferentially STRINGER seeks a look from the merchant, who grunts at him, turns sharply to the others, who look away hastily

KENT That's better Bring it into the club room Send in a punkah wallah

[KENT walks through the room looking contemptuously at the clerks They are awed and subdued by his presence]

VINCENT (*continuing*) Well, all these rules and privileges of merchants are so childish

STRINGER Now you are beginning

VINCENT Well, why should only the senior merchants be allowed to use a native umbrella bearer ?

[They all get a little exasperated with VINCENT STRINGER takes up the cards for a game]

STRINGER (*to VINCENT*) If you want to reform anything, you had better go and join up with Clive He would like a friend, no doubt, he hasn't any out here

MILLER Except Maskelyne, perhaps

STRINGER Oh—him !

JOHNSON S'sh !

[MASKELYNE has come in, the others hush immediately MASKELYNE says, "Good morning," but they deliberately ignore him and he goes to the corner and sits by himself The clerks continue to whisper]

Used to be a good fellow until he made a friend of Clive

STRINGER Birds of a feather (*Dealing the cards He turns to VINCENT*) If you take my advice you'll leave reforming the East India Company to those who like to be in hot water

[VINCENT *withdraws and goes out* There is a commotion outside as MR PEMBERTON, one of the richest and fattest merchants, arrives

He is a big, wheezy man, and at the moment he is choleric He dismisses his bearers angrily and wheezes up the steps He glares at the clerks, who shift uneasily and turn to their game KENT and another merchant come from the inner room and see him

KENT Pemberton ' What s the matter ?

PEMBERTON (*roaring*) Matter ? Matter, sir ? Pretty goings on ! Damn it, sir, these young writers, these clerks (*he throu s the word at the clerks in the corner with a contemptuous gesture , they at once shrink round the table*), begin to assume the privileges of merchants before they have drawn their first month s salary

KENT (*calming him*) Yes, yes, yes, but—

PEMBERTON I have just made an example of the worst of them

KENT One of your clerks ?

PEMBERTON Yes, sir That damn fellow Clive

KENT Why, what did he do ?

PEMBERTON Do ? That fellow, sir, who has not been five minutes in the country, was strutting about the bazaar with a native bearer holding an umbrella over him

KENT But surely he knows the rule ?

PEMBERTON It was done out of sheer impertinence Moody, sullen, bad tempered blackguard ! No respect for the law or anyone !

KENT You warned him, I hope ?

PEMBERTON Warned him ? Damn it, warning's

no use ! I snatched the umbrella from his bearer, broke it, and flung it into the gutter

KENT Quite right Quite right

[VINCENT, the little weedy clerk, comes in quickly and runs over to the collection of clerks, and whispers excitedly]

VINCENT I say, that fellow Clive

[He stops on seeing the merchants, and tries to join his group]

PEMBERTON Well, sir ? What about him ? Out with it

[They all rise as he speaks to them VINCENT at first quails, and then giggles]

VINCENT *(ducking and currying favour)* It s Mr Clive, sir He is coming to the club in state He s coming to the club with about six umbrella bearers, just like a senior merchant !

[There is a noise of jabbering natives PEMBERTON nearly explodes, but KENT prevents him charging down the steps, and draws him back to a position where he can watch, unseen by CLIVE CLIVE, in a particularly rebellious and aggressive mood, appears at the entrance to the club He has several umbrella bearers and other natives as a bodyguard]

CLIVE gives a good imitation of PEMBERTON dismissing the bearers They grin and depart CLIVE comes up the steps and goes to the group of clerks and flings the broken umbrella down]

CLIVE That s what I think of Councillor Pemberton

[He sees their faces, glum and frightened]

What the hell's the matter with you all ?

[He follows their eyes, and turns The three Merchants are coming forward towards him, PEMBERTON leading]

PEMBERTON Mr Clive Come here, sir

[CLIVE moves CLIVE and PEMBERTON and the merchant are now centre stage]

(*lowering*) So, sir, you are slow to learn your lesson, it seems Mr Kent, would you ask the Governor if he will honour me by coming here ?

[*The clerks react to this, and repeat "The Governor"*]

KENT Certainly (*He goes into the inner room*)

PEMBERTON Now, sir, what excuse have you ? You know the rule well enough ?

CLIVE Yes, but I can see no sense in it

PEMBERTON Damn it, sir a rule is a rule !

CLIVE Yes, but a damn' bad rule remains a damn' bad rule

PEMBERTON I—I—the Governor shall deal with you, sir Stand over there, sir (*He crosses to the other clerks*) And you, gentlemen, you would do well to take warning Oh, I know the talk that goes on You are dissatisfied, it seems, with the conditions here Let me tell you, gentlemen, this great Company has been built up by the hard work and endurance of your predecessors Thanks to us, sir, you enjoy privileges greater than we ever had

CLIVE But the salary remains the same

PEMBERTON (*turning to him*) Silence As for you, sir, we have heard something of your reputation They tell me you were expelled from school for blackmailing shopkeepers for halfpennies under threat of having their windows broken Yes, and drilling a rabble of urchins in the street and holding up the town in terror You think you will continue those pranks out here You are mistaken—mistaken, sir

[*The GOVERNOR arrives with MR KENT He is cold, calm, severe The other clerks react to this and stand up*]

PEMBERTON (*seeing him, becomes servile and ingratiating*) Your Excellency, I must apologise for disturbing you at this hour

GOVERNOR There is no need to apologise, Mr Pemberton, you can rely upon me (*He looks round*) Where is this young man? (*He surveys CLIVE, and then takes in the other clerks*) If you please, gentlemen, I desire your attention Mr Stringer, kindly see that no servants come in for a few minutes

[STRINGER *hastily crosses to the door*

The GOVERNOR is now in the centre of the stage with CLIVE

(*Turning to CLIVE*) Now, sir I have had complaints about you before You seem to forget your position here You are only a clerk—and a very junior one Upon Councillor Pemberton will depend whether you continue in the service of the East India Company or are sent home in disgrace Councillor Pemberton, will you come forward, please

[PEMBERTON *comes forward and waits The GOVERNOR continues to CLIVE*

Now, sir, are you prepared to apologise?

[*A pause CLIVE does not reply*

Well, sir?

CLIVE (*a pause*) I suppose so

GOVERNOR Now, sir

[*There is a pause while CLIVE struggles against the temptation to let fly*

CLIVE (*mumbling*) I—I—oh, I apologise

GOVERNOR Very well See to it that I have no further cause for complaint

[*He nods to PEMBERTON and goes out The clerks turn away and whisper PEMBERTON nods to his group and then comes down to CLIVE*

PEMBERTON (*patronisingly*) There, sir, you heard what the Governor said? Perhaps that will teach you a lesson And now, to show that I accept your apology, I am willing to let bygones be bygones You may come and dine with me

CLIVE I beg your pardon ?

PEMBERTON I said—come and dine with me

CLIVE Sir,—the Governor ordered me to apologise to you, not to dine with you

PEMBERTON Well, I'm—

[He and the other merchants, outraged, go—one or two down the steps, one or two into the inner room JOHNSON and another clerk turn to go There is silence The clerks mutter, " Damn' fool " , " Get us all in his bad books "]

CLIVE is going to flare out when MASKELYNE takes his arm and brings him to a table by themselves MASKELYNE pours him out a drink, and drinks care fully CLIVE swallows his at a gulp

We now notice that EDMUND MASKELYNE is the direct antithesis to CLIVE He has a great dignity and a precision in manner The contrast between the two men is important, since, from an audience point of view, MASKELYNE represents the normal respectable citizen, and this attitude throws into relief CLIVE's moody fits, his quick transitions and his sudden explosive outbursts

CLIVE Better leave me to myself, Edmund

MASKELYNE (smiling) Now you are in the depths of despair again

CLIVE I seem hemmed in—and there is no way out

MASKELYNE Yet you were a different man that night we escaped from the French at Madras

CLIVE (*firing up*) Yes, by God, there was action there—planning—adventure—risk—one was alive (*He relapses*) And now here I am back to this damned clerking again

MASKELYNE S sh !

CLIVE (*relapsing into moodiness*) To sit on a stool from morn till night, filling ledgers, entering up bills, and saying ' Yes, sir,' and " No, sir," and

"Very good, sir," to those pompous pigs

MASKELYNE It won't be for ever

CLIVE No I might become one myself !
Good God, so I might !

MASKELYNE (*smiling*) No, I can't ever see you like that

CLIVE (*bursting out*) I tell you, Edmund, if I thought there was nothing else out here but this kind of life, I'd shoot myself to night

MASKELYNE (*soothingly*) Well, you tried that once—but you promised me never again That was a promise, mind

[*With one of his sudden transitions, CLIVE drops his ill temper This is the man of vision looking into the future MASKELYNE treats this aspect of CLIVE with gentle indulgence meted out to a child*]

CLIVE (*quietly*) Edmund, there was something queer about that night Twice I put the pistol to my head and pulled the trigger, and twice it missed fire Yet when you came in and stopped me trying the third time, you fired it through the open window and it went off well enough

MASKELYNE Oh—just a chance, of course

CLIVE I wonder After you had gone that night, I sat for a long time thinking It came upon me that perhaps I was destined for something after all

MASKELYNE (*smiling at such talk*) I am sure you are

CLIVE (*firing up again*) But not for clerking, not for loading out muslins and spices and transporting tea for the fat dowagers in Mayfair to gossip over No, by God, no And yet there must be something—something I could do

[*He sinks down and relapses into gloom again*]

MASKELYNE takes the opportunity to speak seriously to CLIVE, and as he does so, plays with the locket round his neck, emphasising his point with it

MASKELYNE Now listen, Bob When this war with France is over and we can move freely again, things will change They are bound to Your moment will come All you need is patience, patience, and then more patience !

[He has been emphasising his point with the locket, which has come open CLIVE takes hold of his wrist and looks at the locket]

What is it ?

CLIVE That picture !

MASKELYNE What ? Oh, this locket

CLIVE I always wanted to ask you Who is it ?

MASKELYNE It's Margaret

CLIVE Margaret ?

MASKELYNE My sister Haven't you seen it before ?

CLIVE Often , for weeks past I ve been looking at it, but I never liked to ask you (*Obviously it is much more than passing interest*) Can I—can I see it more closely ?

[MASKELYNE, smiling, takes off the locket and passes it to him CLIVE looks at it a long time]

(Very quietly) It's a beautiful face *(Suddenly he looks at MASKELYNE and says)* Would she come out here, do you think ?

MASKELYNE (*puzzled*) Possibly , but why ?

CLIVE (*simply*) I want to marry her

[This is too much even for MASKELYNE's tolerance]

MASKELYNE (*rising, annoyed*) Bob ! Don't joke !

CLIVE (*flaring up*) By God, Edmund, do you think I would joke on a subject like this, and with this portrait in my hand ?

[The clerks look round and mutter, ' Quarrelling with his best friend now ']

MASKELYNE (*soothing him*) Sit down, Bob Don't flare up at me Is it to be wondered that I thought you were joking ?

CLIVE (*indignant*) Joking? How could you believe that of me?

MASKELYNE I will give you three good reasons why I should think so. You've never met her, she has never seen you, and would any man ask a woman to undertake the terrible discomforts of perhaps a year's voyage in order to marry a man she has never seen? Now come. It's asking a great deal, isn't it?

[CLIVE *relapses into gloom*

CLIVE (*mumbling*) You never know. The more you ask of a woman, the more she will give.

MASKELYNE (*scandalised*) Bob, really!

CLIVE (*insistent*) I feel she *would*. (*He plays with the locket*) I'm sorry, Edmund.

MASKELYNE (*puts a forgiving hand on his arm*) That's all right.

CLIVE (*returning to the question*) Then you will ask her?

MASKELYNE (*unable to resist laughing*) Really, Bob, I don't know what to say to you. You must propose to her, not to me.

CLIVE (*confidently*) I will when she comes out.

MASKELYNE Meantime you can write to her.

CLIVE What? A year there and a year back—at least two years between letter and answer—we should be old before we'd even met.

MASKELYNE (*at a loss*) But, Bob, think what it means. Think of the cost of that long voyage. Besides, neither of us has any money.

CLIVE No. (*A great idea*) We could borrow it off the Jews in the bazaar.

[*This scandalises MASKELYNE again*

MASKELYNE Well, really—if it were anyone but you, Bob, I should say it was outrageous.

[CLIVE *drops all pretence and becomes terribly in earnest*

CLIVE Edmund, you think I'm mad Very well then, I *am* mad I can't tell you how—but there are moments when I just *know* what's right for me to do Just as I suddenly felt, when that pistol missed fire, that I was destined for something, so I felt, when I looked at the locket, that she is the only woman in the world I could ever marry

[A pause MASKELYNE *doesn't know what to make of him*

MASKELYNE But do you realise ?

CLIVE (*impatiently*) Yes, yes I'm only a clerk, with nothing to offer your sister Yet, by the time she could come out, it might be different

MASKELYNE Are you sure that umbrella kept the sun off your head this morning ?

[CLIVE *is annoyed, and MASKELYNE puts his hand on his arm*

But you must write, Bob, honestly, sincerely, as you spoke to me just now

[*He looks at him*

Bob ' Why, you're trembling like a schoolboy Are you ill ?

CLIVE No—no (*In a half whisper*) Edmund, I feel she'll come She'll understand

MASKELYNE (*rising in alarm*) Bob ? I've never seen you like this

CLIVE By the time she comes out—she will—I must have something to offer her

[*In the distance a bugle is heard It is followed by another, and yet another Clerks begin to rise and go to the door The effect of the bugle on CLIVE is immediate He stiffens and stares straight ahead, unmoving It is, of course, the deciding moment in his life*

JOHNSON *runs in*

JOHNSON News has just come The French are marching to attack the Settlement

[There is a hubbub from the clerks They are all more scared than excited]

MILLER Damn them Are we to go through still another siege ?

STRINGER The Nawab should stop them

VINCENT He allowed the French to capture Madras from us, and then he allows them to come on here

JOHNSON They say they are several thousand strong, but we shall hold out

CLIVE (*suddenly*) Huh !

[There is a moment's silence They look round at CLIVE]

JOHNSON I beg your pardon ?

[CLIVE begins to walk up and down, seething with impatience]

CLIVE Hold out ? Do you call ours an army ? Mercenaries swept out of the gaols of Europe

STRINGER What do you know about it ?

CLIVE We lost Madras , we shall lose this too The French will soon have all India

[Protests from the others]

STRINGER We shall wait for them here and hold out

CLIVE If the army knew its job, it would know that the best defence is to attack

[The others begin to be derisive, and come round to combine against CLIVE]

STRINGER Oh ho ! (*To the others*) Listen to him ! And what would " General Clive do ?

JOHNSON Yes, perhaps he will tell us that

CLIVE Why, march against Pondicherry, the French capital

[They begin to laugh]

MILLER With five hundred men ? Very easy And what about the Nawab ?

CLIVE If the Nawab won't keep to his bargain, get rid of the Nawab

[This brings a shout of derision and contemptuous remarks muttered 'Damned young fool, etc

JOHNSON Get rid of the Nawab? You fool! The whole East India Company's only his tenant

CLIVE Tenant? Tenant? How long are we going to endure being tenants?

[The others burst out laughing again, and break up their combined attack on CLIVE

JOHNSON Oh, leave him alone—the sun has gone to his head

STRINGER Come along Let us get down to the warehouse for news

[They move out quickly STRINGER calls back

Perhaps by to-morrow our new General will have matured his plans

[They laugh as they go out A pause CLIVE remains very still

MASKELYNE *(when they have gone)* What is it, Bob? Bob?

CLIVE Opportunity! I wanted opportunity, and here it is

MASKELYNE Opportunity?

CLIVE We've been riding the wrong horse, Edmund We've been dreaming of trade, of profits, of becoming merchants—fat, pompous merchants—and here's our real chance

MASKELYNE The army?

CLIVE Yes, the army's rotten to the core, but it needs a civilian—it needs two—you and me, Edmund Will you come with me?

MASKELYNE *(after a pause)* Yes

CLIVE Excellent I knew the way would come *(He strides across the stage, and turns)* We'll go now—to the Governor first—and then—the army—action—

[*The GOVERNOR and the merchants come through hastily* CLIVE stops the GOVERNOR

GOVERNOR Well

CLIVE I wish to resign from the East India Company and join the army

GOVERNOR What? Best thing you can do I can only hope you'll meet with better success there (*To MASKELYNE*) And you?

MASKELYNE Yes, sir

GOVERNOR Good I'll see to it

[*He goes*

CLIVE It's done! Come on

MASKELYNE But, Bob, do you still want me to write to Margaret?

CLIVE Of course Of course Why, man, with opportunity—who knows where I may be by the time she comes out?

[*They move to go down the steps*

MASKELYNE (*laughing*) Why, you might even have risen to be a full lieutenant in His Majesty's Army by that time

CLIVE Who knows?

MASKELYNE (*treating the idea as a joke*) I shouldn't wager on that, if I were you

CURTAIN

SCENE II

A Council of the East India Company at a meeting at Fort St David, three years later

The better impression we get of seclusion and the self-importance of the group, the more effective is CLIVE's entrance and his brusque treatment of the big wigs

There are five present The GOVERNOR, MANNING, PEMBERTON, KENT, and a silly little man called WARBURTON

The GOVERNOR is the only one with any gumption

The whole Council look as if they had been struck by lightning Most of them are staring straight ahead as if they can see nothing but ruin and despair—which is, indeed, the case

GOVERNOR (*breaking the silence*) Well, gentlemen (*He helps himself to sherry*) We're in a bad way

WARBURTON H'm, that's the last bottle of sherry

MANNING Yes, and God knows if we shall ever get any more from England now

GOVERNOR I'm afraid there's no doubt about the news

PEMBERTON My God, gentlemen, it's terrible! The whole of the East India Company will be wiped out—and, what's worse, we shall be wiped out with it

MANNING (*pompously*) I was against it I was always against it—I said it was madness to send our whole army to relieve the garrison at Trichinopoly

[There is a stir outside, and voices]

GOVERNOR Here's Sergeant Clark He may have some news

[SERGEANT CLARK comes in, a big husky black moustached fellow, very stupid but reliable—the 'Old Bill' of the eighteenth century The Council try not to show their great anxiety]

Well, Sergeant?

CLARK A native bearer has just come in, sir—I'm afraid the report's true enough

MANNING The whole army surrounded?

CLARK Yes, sir

WARBURTON My God, we're ruined !

GOVERNOR Quiet, please

[There is silence while the GOVERNOR makes up his mind]

Sergeant, if we comb the whole of the Settlements—take every man available—how many can you get ?

CLARK Oh, I don't know, sir—one hundred and twenty, perhaps, and some hired natives—but you never know what they'll do

WARBURTON But you can't take the guards
We shall all be robbed

GOVERNOR Please There are no officers, of course ?

CLARK No, sir *(Suddenly his face lights up a little)* Might get Mr Clive, sir, in time

[The others look at each other]

PEMBERTON What ? Ensign Clive ?

KENT He's with the army in Trichinopoly, isn't he ?

CLARK *(awkwardly)* Yes, sir

GOVERNOR *(sharply)* Then what do you mean, "Might get Mr Clive" ?

CLARK *(looking at his boots)* Don't know, sir
He might get out

MANNING *(looking at him in amazement)* Get out ? Do you mean, desert ?

CLARK No, sir, but—don't know how to say it, sir—but if there is any kind of sortie made from the town, Mr Clive will be in it, and—if he is in it, he'll be out of it—if you understand what I mean

PEMBERTON I don't

MANNING Anyhow, don't let us worry about him——

GOVERNOR The point is, gentlemen, the army

is surrounded, and we must *do* something !
Sergeant, what can you suggest ?

CLARK I—I could gather the guards, sir

MANNING But if we take every guard from the
Settlements, we shall have the bandits on us

CLARK Yes, sir

PEMBERTON Anything else ?

CLARK (*solidly*) Fortify this place as well as
we can, sir

GOVERNOR (*quickly*) That means annihilation
in the end Surely, with over one hundred and
twenty men, *something* could be done ?

WARBURTON (*querulous*) If five hundred can't
relieve Trichinopoli, what can one hundred
and twenty do ? Eh, Sergeant ?

CLARK Yes, sir

GOVERNOR All right, Sergeant

[SERGEANT CLARK *goes*

PEMBERTON (*looking round*) Well, gentlemen ?

[*They all shake their heads*

We must send to England for reinforcements

GOVERNOR We shall all be dead before they
arrive

WARBURTON (*with a squeak*) But what can we
do ?

PEMBERTON By gad ! I wish I were a younger
man—nothing would please me better than to
shoulder a musket

GOVERNOR (*drily*) Impressive as that might be,
Pemberton, I doubt if it would effect a complete
victory

[*There are voices off A man is heard shouting
orders*

CLIVE (*off*) Sergeant ! Send to my quarters
and get me some clothes—get me some linen,
for God's sake !—and a pair of boots—

[CLIVE, *mopping his face and limping badly, clumps in*

And, Sergeant, find out if there is a mail for me from England—quickly, now

[*He continues swearing and cursing under his breath, with such remarks as 'These damned feet of mine are blistered to hell—God's curse on the thing, why won't it come off?' etc*

MANNING (*rising with great dignity*) Mr Clive? What are you doing here?

CLIVE (*sitting and rubbing his sore feet*) My God, gentlemen, the very question I was about to ask you. Are you doing anything?

WARBURTON Mr Clive—really, sir—you can't come blundering in here like this—the council is sitting

CLIVE (*busy making good some repairs to his clothes*) Let it sit while it can—it'll soon have nothing to sit on

MANNING What do you mean, sir?

CLIVE The whole British army has got itself bottled up in Trichinopoly. I told the Captain he was a fool to go, but he would do it

MANNING You told the Captain, sir?

CLIVE There are forty thousand natives round the town, and the French are in command

MANNING That, sir, is the fortune of war—

CLIVE Fortune of fiddlesticks—it is rank incompetence

PEMBERTON You, sir, dare to suggest—

[*CLIVE gets up, and starts to tackle them quietly at first. It must be noted that he has come for a special purpose, that transpires later. His attitude is the quiet confidence of the man who is going to get his own way in the end*

CLIVE I mean your army knows no more about war than you do about administration

MANNING This is insubordination, sir

CLIVE Good (*He goes to the table and pours out the sherry, copiously*)

WARBURTON And that, sir, is the last of the sherry

CLIVE (*drinking it*) It's certainly the last of that, anyway We may soon have no necks to pour it down That's better (*He addresses the company ironically*) I thank you for your hearty welcome, gentlemen, and now, may I ask, do you intend to do anything, or do you sit here until they throw us into the sea?

MANNING The Council, sir, is considering the matter

CLIVE Aha! And has the all wise and all knowing Council discovered some brilliant plan, some masterstroke to relieve the situation? (*To PEMBERTON*) Have you? (*To KENT*) Have you? (*To WARBURTON*) Have you—no, I thought not

MANNING The army, sir, is here to protect us Apparently it has failed

CLIVE (*quietly*) Yes, and why? I'll tell you why Your officers are out of date your men, the sweepings of the gaols You work them like devils, and pay them like hell—and all to save your miserable profits (*He lowers his voice*) I tell you, gentlemen, you're going to pay for that now You've no army left, Trichinopoly will surrender in a month, and you—you personally, gentlemen, will have to face a native army mad for loot, and the end will be—massacre, gentlemen, massacre

[*He leaves them staring at each other There is a pause* CLIVE lets it sink home

GOVERNOR (*rising and speaking suavely*) Mr Clive has come here to tell us a great many things we already know

[CLIVE stiffens *The GOVERNOR continues He is evidently the only competent one*

Now, sir, you asked us if we had some brilliant plan, some masterstroke to deal with the situation Answering for the Council as a whole, I reply, no But, in return, will you tell us—have you ?

[*The others murmur agreement with these sentiments CLIVE gets up and moves over to the GOVERNOR, and surveys the group at the table*

CLIVE (*wondering*) Well, of course I have (*Looking round*) Gentlemen, really ? Did you think I'd spent three days and three nights crawling on my belly through the enemy's lines for the mere pleasure of seeing you ?

GOVERNOR Ah ! So you have a plan ?

MANNING Well, what is it ?

[*A pause CLIVE looks at them*

CLIVE Give me every man you have got, and I'll relieve Trichinopoly

[*They sit back at first, and then all snort contemptuously*

MANNING Oh, is that all ?

PEMBERTON Huh ! A likely story

WARBURTON So that is the master stroke, is it ?

GOVERNOR Quiet, gentlemen, please (*He goes to CLIVE*) Mr Clive, may I ask, have you any idea how many men we could scrape up by using every guard on every Settlement ?

CLIVE Very few—damn bad troops at that

GOVERNOR The most we could gather would be one hundred and twenty

CLIVE Very well that'll have to do

[*Protests from the others break in, and they surround CLIVE, expostulating*

PEMBERTON You'll get locked up in the place with the others

KENT Since five hundred of our best men, officered by our highest in command, cannot relieve Trichinopoli, may I ask how you propose to relieve it with one hundred and twenty ?

CLIVE I don't propose to go to Trichinopoli at all

[*The members look at each other*]

WARBURTON If you don't propose to go there, how do you propose to relieve it ? That's a good one, answer that

CLIVE I will attack Arcot

[*This is another shock Then they return to the attack*]

MANNING Arcot ?

PEMBERTON I see We take the capital of Southern India with one hundred and twenty men—that is all ?

KENT That is all Just like that

WARBURTON In any case, what has Arcot got to do with it ?

CLIVE (*angrily*) Any fool with half an eye can see If I make for Arcot, the capital, half their army round Trichinopoli will rush to retake it

MANNING And then—— ?

CLIVE And then—— (*Dropping his voice*) Sit down, I'll tell you something, my little ones There are only two ways of attacking an army larger than your own—one is to attack it on the flank, so that it can't use its strength fully, or divide it—and divide it again—and conquer it piecemeal (*They look at each other*) If I tell you one other thing, you'll have learnt the whole art of war It is this A commander always defends his front door—consequently the victory lies with the man who goes round the house to the back

[*They look bewildered*]

Now, gentlemen, you know the whole art of

war—the only thing you don't know is, why, since every soldier knows it, so few can put it into practice

[This is all beyond them, and they look at each other vaguely CLIVE retires to let them think it over]

The SERGEANT comes in with his new boots, and he takes them and tries them on

MANNING *(to the others)* Well, what do you think ?

WARBURTON *(whispering)* It's madness Madness ! We shall leave no one to guard our lives and the Settlements

CLIVE Gentlemen, you've no choice To sit still is to invite massacre If I fail, we can't be worse off *(His tone changes to one of simple knowledge)* Besides, I shan't fail

[CLIVE comes over to the table, ready for their decision He is quietly confident]

GOVERNOR Well, Gentlemen, what do you say ?

MANNING I think it is a mad chance

CLIVE *(abruptly)* Yes, yes, but do you agree ?

[He does CLIVE turns to PEMBERTON]

PEMBERTON Mr Clive's rudeness and in subordination pass belief

CLIVE But do you agree ?

PEMBERTON No—yes, I suppose so

WARBURTON And I, sir

CLIVE *(contemptuously)* Oh, you'll agree *(With a certain amount of respect, to the Governor)* And you, sir ?

GOVERNOR I agree—unreservedly

CLIVE *(surprised)* Thank you, sir

[He stands to attention before the GOVERNOR and then turns]

GOVERNOR What arrangements do you want to make ?

CLIVE (*suddenly*) Ah ! One moment I've been bitten like this before

MANNING Eh ?

CLIVE (*emphatically*) It is understood that *I* am in command ?

GOVERNOR Yes

CLIVE Solely ?

GOVERNOR Yes

CLIVE There s to be no damned interference on the part of anybody ?

[*There are protests*

GOVERNOR (*suavely*) No, no You will be in charge, Mr Clive

CLIVE Good So long as I have your word sir, I know where I am (*Calling*) Sergeant

CLARK Mr Clive

CLIVE How many men have you here ?

CLARK Forty four, Mr Clive

CLIVE (*quickly authoritative*) Assemble them at once Despatch some of them to the Settlements, and collect every man available by this evening—the halt, lame, blind, sick, drunk, or sober

CLARK (*cheerfully*) Yes, Mr Clive

MANNING And when do you propose to set out with this mad army ?

CLIVE At dawn to morrow

PEMBERTON Your commissariat ?

CLIVE What we carry in our pockets

MANNING And where will you make for first ?

CLIVE For Arcot (*Peremptorily*) Haven t you gone yet, Sergeant ?

CLARK (*starting*) Yes, sir, yes—I have

[*He goes out very quickly* CLIVE comes to the GOVERNOR

GOVERNOR And now—you must sleep first

CLIVE Sleep ? Not I

GOVERNOR Well—eat, then

CLIVE Not I If I don't eat, I needn't sleep Is there a mail in from England ?

[There is a pause They look at each other]

WARBURTON The ship was taken by the French near the coast, and the mail's lost

[CLIVE comes to the table, and explodes with rage]

CLIVE *(exploding)* And where the hell was the navy ?

WARBURTON It was—it was—in port at Bombay

CLIVE On the safe side of India ! It would be Damn it I've waited six months for a letter announcing an important departure from England—*(he prepares to go, picking up his boots and impedimenta generally)*—and now your blasted navy has let the French capture it—blundering lot of incompetent idiots, sitting on their damned behinds, letting the French capture my mail, etc , etc

[He blusters off]

CURTAIN

SCENE III

A few months later

It is EDMUND MASKELYNE'S quarters

MARGARET is dressed for the GOVERNOR'S reception, but she is nervous and agitated—and no wonder She has come out to see, and possibly marry, a junior clerk, a friend of her brother's, by the name of ROBERT CLIVE Why, she does not know, only something in his letter had impelled her And now, before he has ever set eyes on her, he is arriving, not

as a clerk, but as a conqueror Will he want her now ? Possibly not She knows herself to be in a terribly false position

Presently EDMUND comes in in a uniform which is creased and untidy EDMUND is particularly fussy and agitated, the GOVERNOR'S reception for CLIVE means a lot to him MARGARET comes to him and tries to smooth out the creases

MARGARET (*as she pulls and pushes*) You'll never get these creases out What have you been doing to it ?

EDMUND It was packed away during the campaign, of course Nice way to turn out for the Governor's reception

MARGARET There It'll have to do Don't look so worried

[EDMUND goes over to a desk crowded with papers and sorts them out, standing, and speaks as if very pre occupied with his arrangements, which have all been cancelled or altered MARGARET remains staring ahead]

EDMUND Worried ? Do you wonder ? The Governor's furious—a reception being given in honour of Bob's victories—and now—no conqueror to welcome

MARGARET Where can he be ?

EDMUND Nobody knows—left the main force outside the town and just rode off with two officers Here's the army being fêted and no commander All my arrangements altered—mess up all round Can't be helped, Bob will do what he thinks, Governor or no Governor—still, you realise what a wonderful thing it is ? No civilian soldier ever had a reception in his honour like this

[He comes over to her, still studying his papers, and looks up for a second at her]

He's no longer the little clerk I used to write to

you about, eh ? Conqueror of Southern India
at twenty-seven

[MARGARET *nods*

I wish he could have been here

MARGARET I can meet him at the reception
(*with an effort at cheerfulness*)

EDMUND Yes, but I wanted you to meet him
for the first time *here*

MARGARET Why ?

EDMUND Well, it's only natural that if you
and he are to——

[MARGARET *turns away*

Don't be ashamed of a little romance After all,
you *have* come here to——

[MARGARET *stops him*

MARGARET Please

EDMUND Well, well, very natural (*Looking at
her*) I'm glad you're wearing that dress—I want
you to look your best when Bob sees you

MARGARET Yes (*Thinking*) Edmund ?

EDMUND What ?

MARGARET Don't take too much for granted
(*He looks askance at her, and she hastens on*) After
all, he knows nothing about me—and I know
nothing about him——

EDMUND Bob will tell you about himself fast
enough, he's full of his future He—he wants
understanding, you know

MARGARET I don't even know what he looks
like

EDMUND He's a little terrifying at times—a
grand man with men, but women don't under-
stand his manner He's so terribly *direct*—
frightens them, I think I've got to give these
orders out, you'll be ready when I return,
won't you ?

[MASKELYNE *goes out*

MARGARET *covers her face with her hands*

*The AYAH comes in and MARGARET notices her
At once she becomes anxious and secretive*

MARGARET (*with an air of secrecy*) Did you find the Sergeant for me ?

AYAH Yes, Missie Sahib He is here

MARGARET Let him come in

[SERGEANT CLARK *appears, his arm in a sling
In the presence of the lady he appears very awkward
and ill at ease, and not at all talkative at first*

CLARK Yes, Miss Maskelyne ?

MARGARET (*confused*) You are Sergeant Clark ?

CLARK Yes, miss

MARGARET (*at a loss*) Oh, you were all through the great campaign with Captain Clive ?

CLARK Captain—Colonel—Lord knows what he ll be by now, miss

MARGARET Sit down

[*The Sergeant, very confused hesitates and does so,
looking very awkward*

CLARK Thank you, miss (*He waits*)

MARGARET (*with a catch in her breath*) What—what sort of a man is he ?

CLARK Haven t you met him, miss ?

MARGARET No—not yet Tell me—oh—er—will you— (*She offers him a drink*)

CLARK I am not supposed to, miss, while I have got this (*pointing to his arm*) Do me no harm My respects, miss

MARGARET Tell me something about him

CLARK (*stupidly*) About him, miss ?

MARGARET I mean about the taking of Arcot—the relief of Trichinopoly—about the whole campaign in general

CLARK (*woodenly*) Well, miss, don t know as

how I could tell you much about the campaign—being a soldier, I don't see much of it

MARGARET But you were in it ?

CLARK Yes, miss—that's it, you see (*Ill at ease*) Not much to tell, miss We'll take Arcot, he says—and he takes it “ We'll relieve Trichy,” he says, and he does it (*He seeks refuge in drink*)

MARGARET (*desperately*) Yes, but how—how ?

CLARK (*woodenly*) Dunno how it's done, miss

MARGARET How could a hundred and twenty men defeat a whole army and take a capital ?

CLARK Yes, that's so ! (*And then, with an inspiration*) Ah ! Lightning !

MARGARET Lightning ?

CLARK Ever been through an Indian thunder storm, miss ?

MARGARET No, I have only just arrived out here

CLARK Well, we have, we marched through it, and the worst storm that's ever been known The Mad Army they called us—marching by night by lightning—it was too much for 'em they reckoned we was gods I ask you, miss—me a blooming go—pardon me—Indian god The native army fled Arcot surrendered

MARGARET And then ?

CLARK (*reminiscently*) It was prime at first Then the Trichy Army sent twenty thousand against us But the Captain, he knows a thing or two He leaves a few of us in front, and out he goes with all the rest of us—round to the back door, as you might say—and they thought a whole new army was coming, and split up—and then we had 'em (*Another inspiration*) Maybe that's what you meant by campaigning ? Yes, that's how it was

MARGARET Tell me—Captain Clive, was he wounded ?

CLARK Well—— (*He suddenly begins a bucolic chuckle*) Yes, miss, he was

MARGARET (*anxiously*) Badly ?

CLARK (*still chuckling*) Yes, miss, pretty bad—that's where the joke comes in

MARGARET Joke ?

CLARK (*carried away by his own story*) You see, miss, when we went on to Trichy, we had marched day and night—this back door business may be good campaigning, but it s hard on the feet We were all dead beat We thought the French was miles away, but they wasn't They caught us napping proper—at night, too First thing we knew they were firing into us from all sides Yes, it was a—(*heaven knows what he nearly says*)—bad time, miss

MARGARET But what is there to laugh at ?

CLARK (*still chuckling*) Captain Clive, miss, he come out of his tent in his night shirt, with his legs all bare Somehow he got a cut across the head, and there he was, held up by two sergeants, going straight for the hottest place in the fight, which was a pagoda

MARGARET Were you one of the sergeants ?

CLARK Why, no, miss If I had been I wouldn't be here, for they was both shot dead right and left of him—yes, right and left

MARGARET He was alone ?

CLARK Yes, miss And what d'ye think he done ? He walked straight up to the pagoda, cool as you like, and he says to them, ' Throw down your arms,' he says, ' you re surrounded It being dark, they couldn't see whether they was or they wasn't ' I've come to offer you terms,' he says, ' and unless you surrender you ll all be cut to pieces ' It was the way he said it, you see, miss It was grand And by the time we got up to him, he had em all lined up

ready to move off Next day the army couldn't march for laughing

MARGARET Oh——

CLARK (*anxiously*) Nothing wrong, miss ? Perhaps I shouldn't have told you about the night shirt

MARGARET No, no, no, I'm very grateful to you

[*The AYAH appears and beckons to MARGARET She hastily gives the Sergeant a present of money and edges him away, as if anxious he should not be seen*

CLARK (*going*) Thank you, miss You'd have laughed, too, miss, if you'd been there You'll see him to night, miss—you ask him about it——

MARGARET Yes—yes, I will——

CLARK Good night, miss Couldn't march for laughing, that's a fact they couldn't—didn't even grumble about anything—that'll show you

[*He goes out, still chuckling over his story*

MARGARET, *left alone, is more disturbed than ever Her instinct is to run away—she is afraid of this man MASKELYNE returns hastily, runs to his desk, puts his papers down as he speaks*

EDMUND Well, we found out where he is, but that doesn't help us He went twenty miles out of his way to destroy the great monument of victory put up by the French Good idea, of course—impress the natives—but he's upset every blessed arrangement I've made and the Governor's dancing with rage

MARGARET Then he won't come ?

EDMUND Oh, yes, he's on his way, but he'll have to go straight to the reception just as he is—and a nice sight that'll be Well, you'll have to meet him there

[*MARGARET suddenly seizes his arm*

MARGARET Edmund, listen to me and try to understand I—I—can't meet this man

EDMUND But why ?

MARGARET (*desperately*) Don't you see ? Oh, how can I explain ? I came out here to meet a clerk, getting five pounds a year, who was your friend There (*she is ashamed*)—there was some idea of—he'll think I expect him to marry me Oh, why did you send for me ? Why did I come ?

EDMUND Margaret, it's no use backing out of it If Bob wants to see you, he'll see you If he wants to ask you to marry him, he'll ask you—you don't know him

MARGARET That's just it See him first, I implore you—let him know somehow that I expect nothing—nothing—nothing I'm just your sister on a visit here

EDMUND Yes But it won't be any good Won't you come with me ?

MARGARET No

EDMUND Well——

MARGARET Yes, yes, you must go Tell them I have a headache—anything, let him meet me casually some day—not yet, I beg you

EDMUND As you will, my dear

MARGARET If I seem to be—even unfriendly, it will only be that I wish him to know that I expect nothing

[There is the sound of a distant bugle, and faint cheers are heard]

The bugle call is taken up by others, and closer

EDMUND He's arrived in the town (*They look at each other*) Are you sure you won't come and meet him ?

MARGARET No, no (*She sinks into a chair*)

EDMUND (*giving it up*) I don't know what I shall say to him He'll probably walk out of the Governor's reception, and come straight here

MARGARET I shall go to bed

EDMUND That won't stop Bob

[He goes out]

MARGARET Ayah !

[The AYAH comes in]

Take these things to my room

AYAH Missie Sahib not going ?

MARGARET No, I stay here

[There are other far off cheers, very faint, and then sounds at which MARGARET raises her head The AYAH, hearing them, goes to the doorway]

AYAH *(excitedly)* It is he !

MARGARET *(alarmed)* Who ?

AYAH The great Sahib

MARGARET My brother ?

AYAH Clive Sahib

MARGARET *(alarmed)* It is impossible Oh !
Tell him I've gone to the reception—he'll find
my brother there—tell him anything

*[Still maintaining her dignity she braces herself up
for the meeting from which she cannot escape]*

*There is a clatter outside, a jingle of spurs, and
CLIVE's voice is heard calling EDMUND*

*In a few moments, CLIVE, dusty and travel worn,
comes in impetuously CLIVE is definitely dirty,
dishevelled and untidy He has ridden twenty miles
in the heat, and he should look it or the following
scene loses half its point MARGARET remains
transfixed The two stare at each other until she has
to hold on to the table for support*

*CLIVE's manner changes completely This is the
woman he has waited for He comes firmly towards
her, never taking his eyes off her*

CLIVE *(after a long pause)* You are Margaret ?
You're like your portrait *(He repeats in a lower
voice)* Yes, you are Margaret *(He means the
MARGARET he has dreamed of)*

[MARGARET tries to keep up her pretence of dignity, but is wilting,

MARGARET (*in a whisper*) The reception ! The Governor !

CLIVE (*not taking his eyes off her*) They can wait (*He advances to her inexorably*) Tell me You came out to marry me ?

[MARGARET almost gasps at the direct question
Tell me You did ? Didn't you ?

[All MARGARET's subterfuge goes She meant to say " No "

MARGARET (*finally*) Yes I did (*She turns away*) Oh, that was terrible !

CLIVE (*looking down at her*) It was magnificent !

MARGARET Yes, but now

CLIVE Now ?

MARGARET Don't you see ? It is different—I didn't know you then , I hadn't even seen you

CLIVE You mean that I'm—— (*The conqueror becomes scared himself He becomes self conscious and apologetic*) I know—I realise—I am perhaps not what you expected—I know I'm not good looking (*He becomes conscious of the state of his clothes*) I shouldn't have come to you like this—I'm dusty, dirty—look at my hands—they're terrible——

MARGARET (*relenting at once and moving up to him*) Oh, no—no—no—it isn't that

CLIVE (*bluntly*) Then what ?

MARGARET I beg you—I implore you—don't think anything more of our arrangement

CLIVE (*inexorably*) Why not ?

MARGARET You're a great man now—you've all India at your feet

[CLIVE ceases to be the lover for a moment and becomes the man who loved ostentation

CLIVE (*swelling*) Huh ! That's nothing ! You'll see ! I'm little better than the clerk you expected

—as yet, we've only got a corner of India so far, there is the rest of it to conquer, to organise
MARGARET Yes?

CLIVE I've only just begun You'll see—I shall be rich—I shall be in Parliament—I'll have estates, a house in Berkeley Square—you will have your carriage, and one day you'll be "milady"

[He feels rather fine, laying all this, as it were, at her feet MARGARET smiles at his boasting, and then pricks the bubble gently]

MARGARET And have you nothing else to offer me but that?

[CLIVE is genuinely perplexed for a moment What else can he offer? All his self assurance goes]

CLIVE Well—nothing but myself—

[He stops, realising that that is exactly what she means He continues now very humbly, adding]

If that would be anything

MARGARET *(quietly)* It would be all

CLIVE All!

[He is overwhelmed at that, and remains looking at her, in another second he would fall at her feet]

MARGARET suddenly remembers her position

MARGARET You must go—to the reception You owe it to the Governor

[CLIVE goes off into a tantrum again]

CLIVE *(flaring up)* I owe them nothing Every regular soldier out here has done his best to spike my guns They hate me, because I win battles against their regulations *(He stops abruptly, and after a pause comes back to her and says sharply)* Why aren't you at the reception?

MARGARET *(smiling)* I was frightened of meeting you

CLIVE *(bluntly)* Why? *(It comes to him)* Ah! You thought I had changed You thought that? You did, didn't you?

MARGARET Don't bully me ! Yes

CLIVE You didn't know me

[He turns away, and then returns and says peremptorily]

We will go to the reception—

[She starts]

—together—

[She begins to protest]

Yes, we'll go—now !

MARGARET *(sharply)* No !

CLIVE *(carried away with the idea)* Yes—as my guest of honour They can't refuse—I'll demand it I shall get my way, you'll see

[In his exuberance he takes her hand and sweeps her to the exit]

Come, it will be a magnificent beginning for us

MARGARET A beginning ?

[CLIVE drops his voice to one of deep sincerity]

CLIVE Of our life And may the end—when it comes—be something like this—

[He, involuntarily, has taken her hand In another second he would have embraced her, when he suddenly remembers how untidy and dishevelled he is He hesitates, looks ashamed, and mutters like a boy]

Forgive me—I'm not fit to touch you—my hands—my clothes—I must look terrible

[MARGARET looks at him a long time Suddenly carried away, she kisses him lightly]

CLIVE *(overwhelmed)* That's courage My God, courage !

[From the doorway she impulsively puts out her hand to him]

MARGARET Come, then

[They go off together]

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE I

Three years later (1755)

Queen's Square, London It is the drawing room upstairs Double doors at the back, and the entrance from the corridor is on the right

It is CLIVE'S house—his first home with MARGARET His favourite chair, his footstool, the side table with certain things of his placed just so " The furniture is set here as it will be in the last scene of the play

The group of fashionable people of the period are collected in CLIVE'S house CLIVE'S affairs are desperate, and the only person who does not know how desperate they are is MARGARET who is too taken up with her child The child is very ill

The group consists of a dowager, LADY STANLEY, LORD DALMAYNE, a fat little gossip of fifty, the HON GEOFFREY ST AUBYN, a very effeminate young man with a powdered face, and LADY LINLEY, a 'blue stocking' of the period and a dress reformer LADY LINLEY is always chafing at the idea of CLIVE being 'tied, as she considers it, to a woman like MARGARET, who cannot help him in his career The group at present are talking in low tones of CLIVE'S affairs

An AYAH comes in with a tray and medicine glass and crosses to the double doors and goes in

LADY STANLEY Who's going to tell her the news?

LORD DALMAYNE One can't help feeling sorry for poor little Mrs Clive

ST AUBYN Hasn't she any idea of the state of his affairs?

LADY LINLEY (*indicating the inner room*) No, one of her brats is ill, and one can get no sense out of her

LORD DALMAYNE Poor little woman—not a success in Society, I'm afraid

LADY STANLEY She is certainly no help to him in that way

LADY LINLEY All great men seem to marry insignificant women

[MARGARET comes in She is dressed very much more simply than the others, is a little untidy and very distraught She knows she ought to attend to her callers, but she cannot fix her mind on them The moment they see her they cease to whisper together]

MARGARET Please forgive me for neglecting you

[They protest]

but Sir Kynaston is attending the child, and I cannot leave the sick-room I—please excuse me

[She goes over to a huge work-box which is used as a medicine chest and searches for something The others make conversation obviously as follows]

ST AUBYN Lord Dalmayne, do tell us what you thought of Garrick's Hamlet ?

LORD DALMAYNE Shakespeare—in modern dress—ridiculous I dislike it

ST AUBYN A dull play—I find no wit in it

LADY STANLEY Mr Garrick is always charming—even as Hamlet

[MARGARET finds what she wants, comes back, is about to speak, and then, in a flutter, goes off into the inner room]

LADY LINLEY *(scornfully)* A hen—nothing more

[The others instinctively group together again]

LADY STANLEY They say he's ruined—hasn't a penny

LADY LINLEY Do you wonder at that, with all this absurd ostentation ?

ST AUBYN They say that his election to the House cost him five thousand pounds

LORD DALMAYNE Some of the electors died of over-eating at his expense

ST AUBYN Before or after they'd voted ?

LADY STANLEY Oh, after they'd voted Clive is far too good a general not to see to that

LADY LINLEY Disgraceful

ST AUBYN No worse than the other side They let all the prisoners out of gaol, drove them to the poll, and then locked them up again

LORD DALMAYNE Gad, that was clever

[*An Indian servant announces* MRS NIXON MRS NIXON, *an ultra-fashionable young woman of the period, sweeps in*

MRS NIXON Ah, so you are all ahead of me with the news ? The vultures have gathered to pick over the corpse

LORD DALMAYNE Mrs Nixon, your servant Is this report true that you are to be married again ?

MRS NIXON Yes, and, my dears, according to the new law, we actually have to have the banns published in a church, telling everybody of our intentions

ST AUBYN I think it's disgusting—the principle, I mean

MRS NIXON So like washing one's dirty linen in public

LADY LINLEY (*grimly*) Well, if it needs washing

MRS NIXON (*seeing her*) Dear, still thinking out charming things to say to your friends (*Dropping her voice*) I—suppose you've heard that your wonderful Bob Clive is unseated in Parliament ?

LADY LINLEY Of course I have

MRS NIXON Does Mrs Clive know ?

LADY LINLEY No

MRS NIXON (*sweetly to LADY LINLEY*) Of course, that's why you're here Naturally you'd like to be the first to tell her

[SIR KYNASTON FRITH *comes out of the double doors and bows to the ladies*

LADY STANLEY, *who adores him, gushes over him at once*

LADY STANLEY Ah, Sir Kynaston ! Don't tell me You have effected a complete cure, I am sure

SIR KYNASTON I wish I could say so

MRS NIXON What is it ? Not measles, I hope

SIR KYNASTON No , something far more serious, I am afraid

LADY LINLEY (*impatiently*) I suppose she has no time even to give a thought to her husband's affairs ?

SIR KYNASTON For the moment her head is full of the child

LADY LINLEY Children are well enough, but here is a man of purpose——

MRS NIXON He is so rude to everybody

LADY LINLEY Yes, but what fire !

MRS NIXON Ah, my dear, you see nothing wrong in him—except perhaps his choice of wife

LADY LINLEY He should have married a strong minded woman

MRS NIXON (*sweetly*) Like you, dear ?

LADY LINLEY *Any* strong minded woman

SIR KYNASTON He'd probably have killed her

LORD DALMAYNE What will he do, do you think ? Go back to India ?

LADY LINLEY If he does, would she go with him ?

SIR KYNASTON Certainly not She couldn't leave the child now

LADY STANLEY The child ? Oh, surely there are nurses

SIR KYNASTON No The poor boy will need his mother badly

[MARGARET comes out at the double doors She is perplexed and unable to think She hurries to the cabinet and takes something out, goes back to the door and gives it to the AYAH She meets SIR KYNASTON on his way out

MARGARET There is nothing else I can do ?

SIR KYNASTON I'm afraid not

MARGARET (*pleading*) You'll come back this evening ?

SIR KYNASTON Certainly, if you wish it

MARGARET Please He likes to see you

SIR KYNASTON Very well

[*He bows to the ladies and goes*

The others look at each other and nod, to suggest the time has now come to tell MARGARET

LORD DALMAYNE (*in a low voice*) We d better prepare her for the worst

[MARGARET makes a great effort to attend to her callers They wait grimly They see she cannot collect her thoughts

MRS NIXON And how is the child ?

MARGARET Not not so well to day

LADY LINLEY (*sternly*) Mrs Clive—we thought you ought to know something—about your husband

MARGARET (*vaguely*) Oh yes (*And then, with a flash of interest*) He isn't ill ? An accident—tell me—— ?

MRS NIXON No, no

LADY LINLEY Things went very badly for him to-day I am afraid you ll have to bear the blow bravely

MARGARET (*wild eyed*) What is it ?

LADY LINLEY He has lost his seat in Parliament

MARGARET (*relieved*) Oh ! Is that all ?

LADY LINLEY Surely you realise——

MARGARET (*apologetically*) I know very little of his affairs, but I know that they keep him from home a great deal—and I would like him to be here more with the children, they scarcely see him

LADY LINLEY (*indignantly*) But surely you are ambitious for him

MARGARET (*vaguely*) Ambitious ! But he has already achieved as much as any man could in a life time (*With an air of relief*) But now it may be different—we can settle down there won't be so much for him to do perhaps he d have more time for us

[LADY LINLEY and MRS NIXON look at each other

LADY LINLEY I think you should know also that

[MRS NIXON stops her

MRS NIXON (*tactfully*) My dear, you must certainly be prepared for changes In some ways it s a pity you could not prevent his lavishness—keeping up this establishment, for instance—it must have cost a fortune

ST AUBYN An entire fortune, I should say

MARGARET I know, it frightens me, but what can I do ? I don t want these things

LADY STANLEY What then, my dear, do you want ?

MARGARET I haven't thought—just him happiness the children A cottage would be enough

MRS NIXON A cottage and a home ! Romantic !

LADY LINLEY (*bitterly*) All you want is just domesticity

MARGARET Oh, but he is ill He has always had these terrible headaches—sometimes he can hardly hold up his head He he needs rest

MRS NIXON (*sweetly*) Yes, dear What you really mean is that you want him to need you

[CLIVE comes in, moody, sullen, like a thunder-cloud He bows slightly to the ladies He kisses MARGARET and looks round Obviously he wants to speak to MARGARET privately]

CLIVE (*abruptly*) Forgive me—I wish to speak to my wife

LADY LINLEY (*excusing his rudeness*) Of course, of course—I understand

[*They begin to drift to the door*]

MRS NIXON We only came to say how sorry we were that——

CLIVE (*putting her out of countenance*) Thank you

LORD DALMAYNE If, of course, there is any thing we can do——

CLIVE Again I thank you No

LADY LINLEY (*beginning a speech*) You, Robert Clive, are one of those men

CLIVE Oh, for God's sake do as I ask you go !

MARGARET (*protesting*) Bob, dear, really !

[*The men go*]

LADY LINLEY No, no He is quite right Good day, Mrs Clive

MRS NIXON (*as she goes*) What manners the man has !

LADY LINLEY Yes, but how virile !

[*CLIVE and MARGARET are left alone*]

CLIVE (*muttering*) Damned chattering females cluttering up the place

MARGARET But, Bob, they are your friends !

CLIVE No longer, thank heaven We are out of it God, I am tired, tired ! (*He sinks into a chair and collapses He takes her hand and puts it to his forehead She mothers him a little, moistening her fingers with lotion from one of the bottles*)

[*This scene is duplicated, under different conditions, in the last scene of the play*]

That's better Yes, that's better Your hands

are wonderful Sometimes I think that if I could not come back to you, all this venturing would not be worth while

MARGARET Well, is it ?

[He looks up at her Then he has to break the news to her He is rather on the defensive]

CLIVE Margaret, we re ruined

MARGARET Yes, dear

CLIVE Don't you understand ?

MARGARET Yes, dear But aren't you rather glad ?

CLIVE Glad ?

MARGARET You'll have more time for us now We could settle down in the country some where, perhaps I see so little of you, and we planned so much on our way home from India

CLIVE My dear, my dear, don't you realise ? My money has gone—I am ruined

[This is a complete surprise for MARGARET She stares at him]

MARGARET But you always told me

CLIVE Yes, yes, yes It was right for you to have everything while we could

MARGARET *(shocked by the unfairness of it)* Oh, but, Bob—I never wanted all this—I have asked you many times if all this expense was necessary

CLIVE Well, there it is I wanted to continue to serve my country here, I've fought election after election, but I've lost It's taken every penny I had We have nothing left

MARGARET *(timidly)* We have ourselves, haven't we ? *(Then with sudden anxiety)* Bob, you have decided something ! You have made up your mind What is it ? What are you going to do ?

CLIVE *(shifting uneasily)* Margaret—as soon as I learnt that I was unseated—I went straight

from the House to the East India Company
They need me out there I—I agreed to go

MARGARET (*breathlessly*) And tell me

CLIVE I must sail to-morrow

MARGARET To morrow ?

CLIVE There is no other ship for weeks

MARGARET And I thought we d come back
for good—that this was to be our home

CLIVE But we'll have another home We shall
be rich again—richer than we ever dreamed of
This house is nothing , we will have a mansion
in Berkeley Square—an estate in the country

MARGARET Bob ! Don t ! Do you really think
I want these things ?

CLIVE What ?

MARGARET This is enough, surely It is our
home, Bob Doesn t that mean anything to you ?

CLIVE Yes, yes

MARGARET Wherever we went, I should always
want this room—our room—like this, with all
our special things around us We had such joy
over arranging it when we first came I have
loved it all (*she deliberately stresses her next words,
to prepare him*), and now, *without you*, it will be
nothing

CLIVE Yes, yes, it's a pity (*Suddenly*) What
do you mean— 'without me' ?

MARGARET (*evasive*) Why, you said—you go
to morrow

CLIVE Yes (*Looking up*) I go to morrow ?
We go to morrow !

[*She looks at him for several seconds*]

MARGARET It may not be possible—

CLIVE (*completely surprised*) Not come ? Not be
with me ?

MARGARET You'd be better without me, in
any case

CLIVE (*again at sea*) Without you ? I can't do without you , you know that

MARGARET You really want me ?

CLIVE (*amazed*) Want you ? (*Suddenly*) What have those damned women been saying ?

MARGARET Nothing nothing

CLIVE Tell me—tell me !

MARGARET (*in a dead voice*) What everybody says—that I've failed you—I've not helped in your career

CLIVE (*under his breath*) " Career "

MARGARET I heard one of them say, " All great men marry insignificant women "

CLIVE ' Insignificant ' ah ! That Linley woman—damned blue stocking Margaret—

[*He sees she is standing before him with her eyes closed*

Tears ? From you ? (*Exploding*) God's curse on them ! They've hurt you—

[*He picks her up firmly and puts her gently on his chair*

Don't listen to them, Margaret , listen to me
Your eyes, my dear , take this handkerchief
By God, I wish I had my hands on them !
Margaret (*At a loss for words*) What can I say ? There are no words (*He thinks and thinks what to say*) Margaret, if I could walk into that bungalow in India and see you again for the first time I should be at your feet, as I am now

MARGARET (*overwhelmed at this*) Oh, Bob !

CLIVE My dear ?

MARGARET Thank you

[*They remain silent*

CLIVE (*gently*) They should have said that it is I who fail you

MARGARET Fail me ?

CLIVE I've given you little of all those things I promised

MARGARET (*clutching him*) You shan't say that—you shan't If—if there have been difficult times, there have been wonderful times, haven't there?

[*They look at each other He nods*]

What woman can ask more? You are—what you are, I want nothing else

[*CLIVE now feels the victory is his*]

CLIVE (*more cheerfully*) So, you see, there can be no talk of your not coming Of course you will

[*MARGARET becomes alarmed*]

MARGARET But (*She looks round at the door where the child is*)

CLIVE I couldn't face it alone I can go on and on until my head cracks, so long as I have you to turn to in the end That's it That's it Why, often in the days I have just been through the thought has come to me, soon it will be over, I can run to her I'm like a little child in my need of you

MARGARET Bob—

CLIVE (*as he thinks, the fear in his voice rises*) Go out there without you? I should break down—I couldn't face it—I should kill myself (*He turns to her*) So you see?

MARGARET (*hesitatingly*) But the child, Bob, the child is ill

CLIVE Ill? Yes, yes, I know He must have every care whilst we are away

[*MARGARET faces him suddenly*]

MARGARET Yes, but he—he may not live

CLIVE What?

MARGARET Yes For a long time I wouldn't face it, but now I must There's no hope

CLIVE (*aghast*) But he shall have the very best attention, the King's own physician every thing

[MARGARET looks into his eyes

MARGARET (*slowly*) It will not be enough

[CLIVE stands transfixed as he realises that she is not coming with him Gradually he accepts it as inevitable He must go alone

CLIVE (*stunned*) No hope ! Forget all I said—of course you must stay here I shall manage there will be a great deal to do No, no, you can't, you *can't* come now To a mother the child must come first always—yes, yes (*Dully*) Can I see him ? Will you tell the servants to begin packing ? A year—two years—it's not long—think no more of it, my dear I shall manage quite well alone

[*It must be quite clear that he is viewing his loneliness with horror He moves away from her, his shoulders drooping He goes out—a tragic figure*

MARGARET rings, and then sits looking straight ahead of her

The door to the inner room is ajar and voices can be heard—CLIVE's and something that sounds like the child

The housekeeper, MRS CLIFFORD, comes in

MARGARET Mrs Clifford Give orders to pack the master's things quickly

MRS CLIFFORD Yes, madam

MARGARET He leaves for India to morrow

MRS CLIFFORD To morrow ? Yes, madam I will hurry

MARGARET And—Mrs Clifford ?

MRS CLIFFORD Yes, madam ?

[*She waits so long that MRS CLIFFORD repeats Madam ?*

[MARGARET is trying to say the words, but they won't come

MARGARET Put my things together too I will come up presently to pack

MRS CLIFFORD Madam ? You are going—to India ?

MARGARET You heard what I said—India

MRS CLIFFORD But, madam—the child

MARGARET (*turning away*) Don't Yes Pack, I say Pack !

[*The housekeeper looks amazed, and then retires*

MARGARET *sinks on to the sofa, staring ahead*
Through the open door one can just hear the sound
of a child laughing a little, and a chuckle, and
CLIVE's voice

We see the effect on MARGARET

CURTAIN

SCENE II

Two years later Calcutta

Clive's quarters in the Fort

MASKELYNE, *who is with him, has evidently just returned from a long journey, and has made a report*

CLIVE *is pacing up and down, fuming*

CLIVE Well, what have the noble Council at Madras got to say ?

MASKELYNE (*glancing over the contents of the official report*) They congratulate you upon your brilliant administration The recapture of Calcutta has brought great joy to the Government at home ,

[CLIVE *snorts*

the French power has ceased to exist, the Black Hole is avenged, and your treaty with Suraj ud Dowlah is described as masterly

CLIVE H'm

MASKELYNE Oh ! There's to be a presentation from the Council

CLIVE (*with sudden interest*) Presentation? Good
MASKELYNE The presentation will take the form of a letter of thanks

CLIVE Huh! And my urgent request for money?

MASKELYNE Ah! That's impossible. But they add, there'll be opportunities for you to make money out here for yourself (*He shows the paper*)

CLIVE Aha! I see. Very well. Very well. We'll take them at their word, but, remember, it was they who gave me leave. I am glad to have you back (*This is the end of this reunion scene with MASKELYNE. Now CLIVE sits looking ahead, his mind on the business in hand*) There is much to do.

MASKELYNE Still?

CLIVE (*grimly*) Does the noble Council at Madras think my work out here has ended?

MASKELYNE Yes, of course.

CLIVE Yet, Edmund, whilst we talk here, Suraj ud Dowlah is conspiring with the French, the Mahrattas, and the Afghans to sweep us out of the country.

MASKELYNE What? But do the Council here know?

CLIVE They won't believe it.

MASKELYNE How bad is it?

CLIVE Edmund, we've been through much together, yet I tell you that never—not even at Arcot—have the British been in a more dangerous position.

MASKELYNE Does Margaret know?

CLIVE (*gravely*) No. She's urging me to go home, as I promised, at the end of two years.

MASKELYNE But——?

CLIVE Yet, if I go now, in six months the country will be overrun—I know it.

MASKELYNE What are you going to do?

[CLIVE continues in his matter of fact way]

CLIVE This I shall drag down the Nawab from his throne, and set up his uncle Jaffar in his place

[MASKELYNE *stares at him, bewildered*

MASKELYNE (*aghast*) Depose the Nawab ? Bob ! You can't do that Why, he is King of all Northern India

CLIVE After the Black Hole, do you think we can allow him to continue to be master The man who put our people to that torture is a monster He cannot continue to rule

MASKELYNE Depose the Nawab !

CLIVE (*easily continuing his plan*) The new Nawab, Jaffar, will then take his orders from me

MASKELYNE (*more amazed*) A Nawab take orders from the British ?

CLIVE (*shortly*) Why not ?

MASKELYNE But, Bob, it's unheard of It's—why, the British are only on sufferance here

CLIVE (*easily*) We can't go on at the mercy of every whim of the Nawab In the end, we shall have to rule or get out

MASKELYNE Rule ? That's something new

CLIVE You think I'm mad ? Oh, yes, you do—they all do Well, I am thank God !

MASKELYNE It's stupendous—and we haven't three thousand men out here

CLIVE I know 'em—to a man

MASKELYNE But how will you negotiate with Jaffar at the Nawab's Palace ?

CLIVE (*shortly*) I deal through Omichand

[*This time, MASKELYNE is really alarmed*

MASKELYNE Omichand ? Bob, be careful He is the most cunning and treacherous scoundrel in all India

CLIVE (*carelessly*) Yes, yes, yes I shall outwit him

MASKELYNE *You will outwit Omichand ?*
(*Words fail him*)

CLIVE You'll see With Orientals, I adopt Oriental methods—I may not like it, but only fools are squeamish

MASKELYNE (*after a thought*) And is Admiral Watson in this ?

[CLIVE's easy assurance gives way at once]

CLIVE Ah ! There you have me Ask me to depose a Nawab, trick Omichand, defeat an army ten times the size of ours—yes, I will do it , but ask me to fight the stupidity of Admiral Watson, and, by God, Edmund, I tremble !

MASKELYNE But, Bob, all this goes beyond soldiering

CLIVE (*slowly*) Ye es We must be statesmen, Edmund We play for an Empire

[*His moment of grandeur changes*]

I want you with me, Edmund I'm alone in this—as ever To day we sign the great treaty with Jaffar

MASKELYNE To day ? It is prepared—ready ?

CLIVE (*whispering*) Yes—but it needs Admiral Watson's signature The fate of this country is not in my hands, but in the hands of a dunder-headed old sailor, who can think of nothing but his wife and his own infidelities I shall have to placate, soothe, flatter, the old man—but, sign he must, or Jaffar won't accept the treaty

MASKELYNE But Jaffar can't come to Calcutta He can't leave Suraj ud Dowlah

CLIVE (*grins at him*) You think not ? Go to the corner of the bazaar There will be a palanquin, with *closed curtains* No one must be allowed to see who is inside—choose bearers you can trust and have it brought here

MASKELYNE A palanquin ? With closed curtains—who is it ?

[CLIVE smiles at MASKELYNE enigmatically]

CLIVE We'll see

[MASKELYNE goes out]

CLIVE, alert, rummages amongst his papers, and brings out two large documents—identical except that one is a red parchment and the other white—and looks at them

While he is doing this, MARGARET is seen coming up the steps. She is in black. She carries a few white flowers in her hand

CLIVE looks round, and sees her

(Puzzled) Margaret? Church? To day?

[She looks at him, and drops her eyes to the flowers. What is to day? (He realises, and his voice softens) Of course! Two years ago to day, the boy died. MARGARET Yes. I'm putting these on the altar. Our son. Poor little Bob.]

CLIVE (*very humbly*) And I'd forgotten. There's been so much to do.

MARGARET Yes. You are busy.

CLIVE You will think I had forgotten him altogether.

MARGARET No. I know you remember.

CLIVE Remember? God, I remember. Our drive away in the carriage, when we had to leave him. I shan't forget that I caught the look in your eyes—there was something there that I hoped never to see in any woman's face. It was near hatred.

MARGARET Yes.

CLIVE I was afraid of you for a time—yes, afraid. Later, thank God, it passed.

MARGARET We came through—as we always do.

CLIVE Poor little fellow!

MARGARET (*entreating*) Bob, we must go to England—soon. Oh, I know what you'll say, but I have your promise—two years. (*Quietly*) I can't lose another child.

CLIVE What ?

MARGARET He shouldn't be in this country—he is ill now Don't you see, Bob ? If he gets worse—if he—— I couldn't go through that again—not even for you

CLIVE I know—I know Oh, God, the risks I run—you'd hate me, as you did before, if anything happened—and rightly Just a little longer—a month

MARGARET A month ? (*She shakes her head*)

CLIVE I promise you

MARGARET Promise ?

[*He looks away*]

Surely your work is done They all say so

[*He looks at her, and shakes his head slowly*]

CLIVE (*after a hasty look round*) Margaret, they're living in a fools' paradise

MARGARET There's danger—again ?

CLIVE Yes The crisis is coming Give me leave to stay, Margaret If I achieve this, my work is done

[*She looks at him, and nods*]

MARGARET You know best, dear

CLIVE (*suddenly very quiet*) Margaret Tell me It may come one day, soon, that *I stand at a crossways* To go on, and fail, may mean death to us all

[*MARGARET starts*]

If I were to go on and fail this time, the Black Hole would be repeated—it might even be worse—the Nawab has no mercy on man, woman, or child

MARGARET Oh !

CLIVE And yet I may want to go on, if my work is to endure So I ask you—would you give me leave to go on ?

MARGARET Why do you ask me ?

CLIVE Because, if I fail, it would mean—massacre—"man, woman, and child"—the Nawab has no mercy

MARGARET Bob !

CLIVE Would you give me leave to go on—even then ?

MARGARET I'm very simple, Bob, and I know very little, but I know that a man like you will always do what he must

[CLIVE *nods slowly She understands him*
(*Bracing herself for the question*) Will it mean war ?

CLIVE My way, a quick campaign, one battle—perhaps a bloodless campaign

MARGARET And then ?

CLIVE Everything you can wish for—home, peace, riches, glory, renown, you will be a great lady in England—

MARGARET Bob—as if I cared ! All I want is you, at home with the children—an estate, small if you like—but a home, and all that we have planned so long

CLIVE It shall be so

MARGARET (*fingering the flowers in her hands*)
You can't come to the church with me now ?

CLIVE I—I—God, why do I always have to fail you ? I take everything

[*She shakes her head*

MARGARET You give, Bob I ask no more

[*She moves to go He stops her, and says, very quietly, as he picks out some flowers from her hand*

CLIVE Put this on the altar for me, that one for you, and this—from both of us

[*She goes out*

Immediately CLIVE becomes alert again *He takes out, and holds up, the two parchments—the*

*red and the white, which should be seen clearly—
and places them carefully on the table*

*There is a knock at the door of the inner room
A SERGEANT comes out, and speaks briskly*

SERGEANT The prisoner, sir, asks—

CLIVE Prisoner be damned—he is my guest

SERGEANT (*with a grin*) My mistake, sir He asks if he may drink

CLIVE Of course Give him everything he wants

SERGEANT I have, sir—but—he asks if he has the great Sahib's word that he may drink—I think he means with safety, sir

CLIVE Tell him—on the word of a Sahib

SERGEANT That'll do for him, sir, thank you

[SERGEANT goes in

MASKELYNE comes running up the steps He looks round

CLIVE (*quickly*) The palanquin ?

MASKELYNE (*in a low voice*) It's here It's—
JAFFAR !

[CLIVE grins at him

Shall it be brought in ?

CLIVE (*after a second*) Yes Wait Walsh ?—Where is Walsh ?

MASKELYNE He is outside (*Calls*) Walsh !

[WALSH comes up the steps hurriedly

CLIVE Where's Admiral Watson ?

WALSH He's in his quarters—writing, to catch the mail I heard him speak of coming over to see you

CLIVE Send a man over to watch his house—if the Admiral shows any sign of coming here, warn me

[WALSH goes out quickly

Stand by, Edmund—out there on the verandah—warn me if you see the Admiral Quick

[MASKELYNE *nods and takes up his stand outside*
A gorgeous palanquin is brought in by bearers,
and is set down The curtains remain closed

CLIVE *dismisses the bearers*

He mutters a word to the occupant of the palanquin
JAFFAR, *Suraj ud Dowlah's uncle, emerges*
JAFFAR is a big bearded fine looking man At the
moment he is very ill at ease He salaams to CLIVE
CLIVE *and he greet each other formally*

All the next scene is played with an undercurrent
of haste, of secrecy CLIVE's one idea is to make
JAFFAR *sign*

JAFFAR We shall be alone ?

CLIVE You may rely upon it

JAFFAR It is well A word of this meeting in
the ears of Suraj ud Dowlah, and (*nodding*)
whatever we arrange would soon cease to con-
cern me

CLIVE The treaty is here Very brief You
will be the new Nawab and rule over the
Provinces of Northern India

JAFFAR By the grace of Allah—

CLIVE I, on my side, agree to march my army
of three thousand against Suraj ud Dowlah
How many troops has he ?

JAFFAR Sixty thousand men, and twenty
thousand horsemen

CLIVE As commander in chief of his army,
how many will follow you when you come over
to me ?

JAFFAR I should say, perhaps half—more
possibly

CLIVE They'll follow you ?

JAFFAR They will follow

CLIVE You swear to bring them to me as soon
as I send for them, and at the place I dictate ?

JAFFAR Agreed Where and when you will

CLIVE Good (*Suavely*) Then you are prepared to sign the treaty?

JAFFAR But I'm afraid of one thing

CLIVE Afraid? The great Jaffar afraid?

JAFFAR Afraid of Omichand He has been conspiring with you, with me, and now he conspires with Suraj ud Dowlah himself You can never tell which side he will take

CLIVE I know He has demanded—for his services in negotiating this treaty between us—three hundred thousand pounds

[JAFFAR is amazed]

JAFFAR Three hundred thousand!

CLIVE And it is in the treaty guaranteed by you—by us

JAFFAR By me! But there is not so much money in the treasury

CLIVE (*slowly*) No, but Omichand will be paid in his own coin, and not in the coin of the realm

JAFFAR His own coin?

CLIVE As the treacherous scoundrel he is (*Looking at JAFFAR*) There'll be two treaties between us, this one, the red treaty, the one that he sees (*he shows the treaty on red paper*), guarantees him the payment, in the other, the real treaty (*he shows the treaty on white paper*), the payment clause does not appear

[*This appeals to JAFFAR His face is wreathed in smiles*]

JAFFAR I see But Omichand is too clever The treaty we show him must be signed

CLIVE It shall be signed

JAFFAR By Admiral Watson as well? His signature is imperative

CLIVE (*after a second*) Yes Let us sign first—time is short

[CLIVE offers him the pen JAFFAR draws back, doubtful]

JAFFAR So long as Omichand is in the Nawab's Palace, whispering in the Nawab's ear I fear——

CLIVE (*urging him to sign*) Omichand will reveal nothing—sign

JAFFAR No, no He may be whispering to the Nawab at this minute

CLIVE (*after a slight pause*) Omichand is no longer with the Nawab—sign

JAFFAR (*surprised*) Impossible !

CLIVE My agents told him Suraj ud Dowlah had heard of his dealings with me Omichand was glad to escape We helped him to escape

JAFFAR (*smiling*) From a danger that never threatened him ? *Shabash !* That was clever, very clever But Omichand will worm his way back to Suraj ud Dowlah—you will see

CLIVE He won't

JAFFAR No ?

CLIVE Captain Maskelyne !

[*MASKELYNE comes in CLIVE indicates the door*
Bring in Omichand

JAFFAR Here ? The great Omichand lured here from the Nawab's Palace ? (*Stroking his beard*) My countrymen are unwise to call the English fools

CLIVE We show *this* treaty to Omichand (*Smiling at JAFFAR*) We shall, of course, begin by telling him it's impossible to give him the money We must not appear to give way too easily We play him, Jaffar, we play him—like a fish

JAFFAR (*comprehending*) Of course, of course I may be permitted to become angry—no ?

CLIVE Certainly I shall myself lose my temper, very heartily—you understand ?

JAFFAR And then—— ?

CLIVE We give way under pressure of his arguments

JAFFAR Excellent

CLIVE S-sh !

[OMICHAND is shown in by MASKELYNE He is an unpleasant looking person—sleek, sly, and oily They exchange greetings MASKELYNE takes up his position on the verandah outside and continues to watch anxiously for Admiral Watson

OMICHAND, I propose to deal with this matter in Western fashion and come to the point

OMICHAND Yes, yes Time is precious Well ?

CLIVE Jaffar and myself are agreed in general principles——

OMICHAND Excellent——

CLIVE But there is one difficulty—one great difficulty

OMICHAND (*smoothly*) One that can be overcome, I hope ?

CLIVE That will depend on you This money that you demand

OMICHAND Three hundred thousand—yes

JAFFAR We can't pay it

OMICHAND (*blandly*) I am in your hands, but I cannot forgo the sum

CLIVE Yet all you have done is to bring about a meeting between myself and Jaffar

OMICHAND (*smiling*) It is a fair price for bringing two such great men together

CLIVE We can't pay it

OMICHAND (*gravely*) That is a pity (*Slyly*) And Suraj ud Dowlah would be very angry if it came to his ears that his uncle, his commander-in chief, were here arranging to depose him

JAFFAR (*threatening*) You mean that you will inform Suraj ud Dowlah ?

OMICHAND (*mildly persuasive*) I mean nothing—but that you will be well advised to agree to this sum After all, you obtain a throne and you

become the greatest ruler in India The British establish themselves for ever, the French, Dutch and others will no longer exist, and the country can look forward to years of peace and prosperity It is cheap at three hundred thousand pounds

CLIVE (*pretending great anger*) But you've forgotten one thing The treaty is arranged, and—we can do without you now

OMICHAND I am no longer any use—to you? Well, perhaps to others

JAFFAR (*standing over him*) You also forget that you are far from the Nawab's Palace at the present moment

OMICHAND (*smiling*) Should by chance my body be found in the Ganges, or no news be had of me, my agent, who is an able man, will, in three days, acquaint Suraj ud Dowlah with the arrangements that are being made to depose him

CLIVE Scoundrel! Then you are still treating with the Nawab?

OMICHAND (*gently*) You, gentlemen, are soldiers and see everything from one point of view, but I am a mere merchant—and, like the gods, I must be on the winning side

CLIVE (*as if he is obliged to give in*) We are in his hands Come, Jaffar, will you sign after me? Sign

[*They watch each other warily It is the great moment Then JAFFAR signs the red treaty CLIVE signs*

(*Heartily*) There! Now, Omichand, are you satisfied?

OMICHAND (*interposing quietly, but insistently*) And Admiral Watson?

CLIVE He will sign

OMICHAND I would prefer to *see* his signature

CLIVE (*angrily*) Do you doubt me?

OMICHAND Oh, no, no, no ! We do not doubt for a moment—but still, at the same time, no treaty can be binding without the Admiral's signature

CLIVE Surely if Jaffar is satisfied——

[But JAFFAR is suddenly cautious He smiles into CLIVE's face]

JAFFAR Ah ! I think Omichand is right, we should both prefer to see *Admiral Watson's* signature on *any* treaty (*He means on the white treaty as well*)

CLIVE (*caught*) It shall be so

OMICHAND Quite But *when* will it be there ? For, until then, I can hardly consider the matter concluded And my presence near Suraj ud Dowlah is necessary at once—otherwise, my agent—a good fellow but rather stupid—might carry out my instructions and inform the Nawab you understand the urgency ?

[MASKELYNE from the verandah, attracts CLIVE's attention with the warning]

MASKELYNE Admiral Watson

CLIVE (*hurriedly*) The treaty, with Admiral Watson's signature on it, will be in your hands in a few minutes

OMICHAND Otherwise

CLIVE (*to OMICHAND*) Wait in there Admiral Watson must not see you

[OMICHAND goes slowly into the inner room, while CLIVE fumes with impatience to get him out]

CLIVE (*to JAFFAR*) Quick ! Sign the white treaty with me

[JAFFAR signs leisurely, and CLIVE follows quickly]

CLIVE and MASKELYNE are in agony that the Admiral will arrive, but JAFFAR takes his time getting into the palanquin He gets in and whispers to CLIVE

JAFFAR I take it that the Admiral's signature will be upon the white treaty as well ?

CLIVE Of course—of course

JAFFAR *Otherwise* I cannot regard the treaty as binding

[His head disappears behind the curtains]

CLIVE (to MASKELYNE) The bearers—quick

[MASKELYNE gives a sharp order, and the bearers appear]

(In a low voice) The treaty will be with you in an hour

[He gives the order to the bearers The palanquin is taken off]

Edmund ! *(He puts his hands on his shoulders)*
Some water, for God's sake !

[MASKELYNE gets it for him CLIVE is at high nervous tension He drinks and puts the glass down]

With Omichand pacified—with Jaffar's army—I shall succeed Only this admiral—this blundering elephant of a man—remains I must keep my temper with him I must—I must

[The Admiral's voice is heard off CLIVE assumes a special attitude that he will adopt to bamboozle the Admiral]

Presently, ADMIRAL WATSON, a rhinoceros of a man, with long arms and a growling disposition, charges in CLIVE advances with overwhelming cordiality

Ah, Admiral—glad to see you

WATSON *(glowering)* I saw a palanquin leave here Closed curtains Who was it ?

CLIVE *(charmingly)* My dear Admiral, a sailor of all men, should know better than to ask such questions

WATSON Woman, I suppose You'll get yourself into trouble

CLIVE We all do

[WATSON agrees, and then disagrees hastily]

A glass of wine ?

WATSON You're too damned polite I suppose you want something ?

CLIVE (*easily*) No, no Everything is very quiet There is, of course, the treaty, which we might discuss at your leisure

[*He offers him a drink WATSON takes it, glares at it, and drinks, as if to show that he is not to be placated all the same CLIVE fingers the white treaty thoughtfully*]

WATSON (*loudly*) Look here I've made up my mind

CLIVE (*sweetly*) Yes, Admiral ?

WATSON " Yes Admiral " —what's the matter with you to day ? I said I'd made up my mind about this treaty It won't do

CLIVE Now, now, Watson We've quarrelled already about this——

WATSON And I intend to again

CLIVE Don't think because I quarrel with you, I don't appreciate your point of view I grant you that I am sometimes impetuous—head-strong—you've said so yourself——

WATSON I have, and I meant it

CLIVE And naturally—though I often resent it—foolishly perhaps—in my heart I admire your plain blunt, common sense, and I realise the value of your restraining influence

WATSON Hum ! You're too damned agreeable to-day Quarrelled with your wife, or what ?

CLIVE (*laughing to please him*) What a wit you have when you like, Admiral No, no, no ! For once, let's set aside personal differences—let's see if we can't, by a bold stroke, effect something permanent—something enduring—before we retire Now this treaty——

WATSON I was wondering when you were coming to that I won't sign it Let the Council decide

CLIVE Now, Admiral, do you think a project as big as this should go beyond our two selves ? Are they men of your understanding—can I trust their very good sense like I can yours ?

[WATSON is nearly taken in, and then thunders

WATSON You want me to sign so that you can go ballywhooing all over India, and share the responsibility with me if it goes wrong You want to bamboozle me into pulling your chestnuts out of the fire Damned if I put my head in a noose I won't sign (*He makes a movement to go*)

CLIVE It's a pity In the treaty, Jaffar promises you personally, a gift of forty thousand pounds

WATSON Eh ?

CLIVE Forty thousand—pounds

WATSON H'm !

CLIVE Not that that would make any difference to your decision, of course

WATSON No (*Shaken, he returns to the table*) This is a very momentous decision—do you realise that ?

CLIVE (*humbly*) I agree with you, Admiral

WATSON Is the clause you spoke of inserted in the treaty ?

CLIVE Yes, it's here

WATSON Let me see (*He reads closely*)

CLIVE Don't you trust me ?

WATSON Eh ? Yes But I'll look, all the same Yes, I see Well, if it is in the interest of the country——

[*He signs*

CLIVE Ah ! I am glad Now, now, don't go, Watson There is just one other little point I mentioned to you a second treaty (*He brings out the red treaty*)

WATSON Eh ?

CLIVE In this treaty, I have put in Omichand's preposterous demand for money

WATSON You expect me to sign that too ?

CLIVE Only to outwit Omichand

WATSON He's a damned treacherous, cunning scoundrel He'd sell his own mother, *has* done so, I expect—but I won't sign that

CLIVE (*keeps his temper with an effort—hurt*) It's merely a formality, Admiral

WATSON Formality be damned, sir It's well enough for you to play these tricks, but, damn it, *I* won't

CLIVE (*drily*) You don't mind signing anything which benefits you to the extent of forty thousand pounds, but when it comes to a little intrigue to get rid of a pestilential fellow, who can ruin the whole enterprise, you refuse

WATSON I don't like it

CLIVE Neither do I, but—there are bigger issues at stake

WATSON No My—my conscience will not allow me

CLIVE (*keeping his temper*) Watson—I ask you to consider—if you don't sign, the whole scheme may fall through

WATSON That's right, throw it all on me

CLIVE But, my dear Admiral, what is the use of signing one treaty if you cancel it by not signing the other ?

WATSON Damn it, sir, can't I trust my own conscience ?

CLIVE Conscience ?

WATSON Yes, sir, conscience—I doubt you know the meaning of the word It is well enough for an upstart like you to play these tricks—but not for me, sir Not for me I'll have nothing more to do with it

[*He stumps off, leaving CLIVE still holding the pen*
MASKELYNE and WALSH come in hurriedly

MASKELYNE He has refused ?

[CLIVE *nods*

WALSH Then the whole thing falls through ?

MASKELYNE Omichand will inform Suraj ud Dowlah in three days It is the end

[CLIVE remains standing He looks from one to the other, and at their gloomy faces Then he begins to grin the grin of a buccaneer He chuckles The others look at him in amazement]

CLIVE No, my God, sir, this shall go through

WALSH How ?

[CLIVE's hand has been grasping the pen in his clenched fist He opens his hand, and looks at the pen He looks sideways at MASKELYNE, and slowly turns his eyes to the ink well With a slow gesture he dips the pen—flourishes it, holds it poised in the air, enjoying their bewilderment, and then, with a sweep of his arm, makes a slow firm signature on the paper, saying— Charles—Watson"] The others are aghast

MASKELYNE The Admiral's signature

WALSH But it ll be discovered later !

CLIVE When Suraj ud Dowlah is deposed—victory is with us and India is on its feet—who will care ? Admiral Watson will then be the first to acknowledge the signature Show this to Omichand

CURTAIN

SCENE III

One month later

It is the interior of a large mud shelter overlooking the River Bhagirathi, a tributary of the Ganges at Kutwa Across the river is a village called Plassey The river at this period of the year would be about three hundred feet across The rains are due The heat is stifling In addition to the little army which

is already encamped, there are numerous camp followers—native sellers, nautch-girls who have come with the troops The native sellers of all kinds besiege the troops, and even approach the officers

When we first see the hut, we see only a view of the river—soldiers passing, we hear a bit of a row in the distance—a bellowing sergeant—and comparative quiet

We then notice the group in the hut They are not soldiers They are members of the Council, and they are very perturbed

MAJOR KILPATRICK and CAPTAIN JOHNSTONE are present KILPATRICK is an officer who was always jealous of Clive's success JOHNSTONE is no friend either

Oil lamps give a certain light The punkah wallah is kicked into doing his job at odd intervals

The group of councillors consists of MANNING, PEMBERTON, and KENT Together with MAJOR KILPATRICK and CAPTAIN JOHNSTONE (who are regular soldiers), they represent a solid body of opinion that Clive's march must go no further But they are afraid to tell him so directly, and they await the Governor

MANNING walks up and down haranguing his own cronies before they attack Clive

MANNING You see, Pemberton? You see the line to take? Until the Governor comes we must argue, persuade, show reason——

PEMBERTON And, God knows, we have it on our side

MANNING Hint—suggest—that's all The Governor will carry the authority (*So much for his group Now he turns for assistance to the regular officers*) Major Kilpatrick You agree that to continue this march in the face of Jaffar's obvious treachery is madness?

KILPATRICK I do But I doubt if Colonel Clive will see reason

MANNING And you, Captain Johnstone?

JOHNSTONE (*in his "heavy weather" manner*) Oh, I think the fellow's mad, but, then, I always did. His luck can't hold for ever. Here we are stuck up against the bank of the river, and God knows what is opposite.

PEMBERTON And the monsoon about to break at any minute.

MANNING Ah—I'm glad you reminded me, that's a good point.

JOHNSTONE Once on the other side, and the river in flood behind us, they could annihilate us.

[MANNING surveys officers and civilians]

MANNING Then we are agreed? We are ready for him?

PEMBERTON Yes. Where is he?

JOHNSTONE Oh, staring across the river as usual (*They look at him in surprise*). Been there all the afternoon—staring as if he could see something beyond.

MANNING Is there anything to see?

JOHNSTONE I can't see anything—except mud and the other side. Perhaps he likes the smell of the mango grove opposite.

[*There is a hubbub in the distance—shouts—wailings of the women—sharp orders and quiet*
CLIVE strides in, SERGEANT CLARK at his heels
CLIVE is now a Commander, and all his orders are given quietly, authoritatively]

CLIVE (*continuing to the sergeant*) See to it, Sergeant—tell the native sellers to keep away from the river bank. No one is to cross without my knowledge.

[*He nods to the others. He is studying a sheaf of notes, but continues to give his orders in a monotone, as if they were second nature*]

Major Kilpatrick, the rafts are not complete yet. I've ordered additional men down. The rafts must be ready to night.

KILPATRICK (*a little insolently*) You expect to use rafts ?

CLIVE (*without looking up*) I expect my orders to be obeyed

[KILPATRICK *glances at the Council, shrugs, and goes out*

Johnstone, is the right bank patrolled ?

JOHNSTONE I gave the orders, sir

CLIVE Well, see they've been carried out—that s more to the point Send a few men into the mango grove opposite—at once, please

[JOHNSTONE *shrugs his shoulders and goes out* (*He continues to read the Council are getting a little fidgety*) Well, gentlemen, it was good of you to come all this way for the pleasure of my company

[*He continues to study The others conspire together and MANNING goes forward to the attack*

MANNING We should like your opinion on the situation

CLIVE (*without looking up*) Damned bad

MANNING (*insinuatingly*) Jaffar has not kept his promises ?

[*No reply from CLIVE*

(*At CLIVE, but speaking to the others*) Do you know that five times he has promised to leave Suraj ud Dowlah and come over to us ?

KENT (*playing up*) Yes, yes , and each time he has failed he has promised to join us at a place thirty miles further away——

MANNING Yes, further and further away from Calcutta

[*They look at each other, but CLIVE takes no notice*

PEMBERTON They say he is still with Suraj ud Dowlah's army at Plassey—just across the river

MANNING Yes, sixty thousand troops and twenty thousand cavalry, so I have heard

[*They nudge MANNING to go on*

It would, of course, be madness to take our little army across

PEMBERTON Oh, our commander is much too skilful to be caught like that

CLIVE Gentlemen, from what I can gather, you don't seem anxious for me to cross the river (*Breaking out*) God's death, gentlemen, why don't you say what you mean ?

[*There is an uncomfortable silence*

Then shall I complete the picture for you ? You seem well informed about Suraj ud Dowlah's army Well, I have one good regiment, the Thirty-ninth Foot, in all, eight hundred white troops, one hundred half castes, and the rest Indian troops

MANNING And you still intend to cross ?

CLIVE (*abruptly*) I must be ready If it is any satisfaction to you, gentlemen, I can give you a very good prophecy You ask me what the situation is It is this you will either die rich or die very quickly

[*They begin to get angry*

PEMBERTON (*rising*) You have no right to take this responsibility

MANNING You promised us a bloodless campaign

KENT Yes, the Nawab was to be deposed without a shot

MANNING (*with finality*) I tell you, sir, the Council will not support you

CLIVE Did it ever ? (*He walks away*)

MANNING (*after a pause*) Gentlemen, it is not for us to speak (*To CLIVE*) The Governor will be here, and he alone has authority

CLIVE Then what in God's name do you mean by wasting my time ? Walsh !

[*WALSH comes forward*

These gentlemen have expressed a desire to see round the camp Look after them *(in his ear)* and lose them if you can

[WALSH and Council go out

CLIVE *strides away, muttering* "Busybodies—they give me the belly ache

MASKELYNE *comes in*

MASKELYNE His Excellency has just arrived

CLIVE Good Is he being brought here ?

MASKELYNE Yes

CLIVE No message from Jaffar ?

MASKELYNE No

CLIVE *(walking up and down)* Jaffar—Jaffar—

MASKELYNE You can't trust him

CLIVE Who can trust any Oriental ? But I thought I could trust his greed for the throne *(Sharply)* Sergeant !

[SERGEANT CLARK *comes in*

CLARK Yes, sir

CLIVE You are certain no boat—raft—anything has crossed the river to day ?

CLARK Sentries report nothing, sir, except one

CLIVE Except one Good God, isn't that enough ?

CLARK A sentry thought he saw something crossing far down the river, sir, early this morning

CLIVE Get hold of the man Question him again

[SERGEANT CLARK *goes*

Jaffar—Jaffar Is he greedy enough—covetous enough

[WALSH and JOHNSTONE *come in with the GOVERNOR He is elderly and impressive—a man of the world—and with him CLIVE takes a different*

tone to that he used with the others They greet each other

GOVERNOR I have a letter from Mrs Clive
[*He gives it to CLIVE, who looks at it and does not open it*

I take it things are not very satisfactory ?

CLIVE (*shortly*) Far from it

GOVERNOR (*feeling his way*) You are not, I take it, proposing to cross the river ?

CLIVE I am

GOVERNOR (*guarded*) Oh (*Suavely*) Perhaps you d outline your plans to me ?

CLIVE You think my army incapable of attacking ?

GOVERNOR (*evasively*) Tell me your plans

[*With a look at the others, CLIVE draws them round the table MASKELYNE and WALSH on the left, the GOVERNOR on the right, JOHNSTONE behind*

CLIVE Suraj ud Dowlah's army is drawn up at Plassey in the form of a rough semicircle—like this

GOVERNOR Some sixty thousand in all, I hear

CLIVE But there is only one absolutely loyal general—Mir Murdeen He occupies the extreme right flank

GOVERNOR I see And Jaffar's army ?

CLIVE He is on the left—furthest away from me Suraj ud Dowlah is in the centre

GOVERNOR I see You will advance towards Jaffar first ?

CLIVE No

GOVERNOR You will go straight for Suraj ud Dowlah ?

CLIVE No If we strike at the heart of the enemy the waverers are won We strike at Mir Murdeen himself—our full force, every available man, every gun we have

GOVERNOR But—Mir Murdeen's army alone is four times yours

[CLIVE looks up with a grin of cunning]

CLIVE Yes, if we meet it front to front Mas kelyne here will act as the skeleton army and hold the whole of our front But I and every fit man will march by night—a swift forced march We come upon the extreme right flank of Mir Murdeen—where he can but use *one quarter* of his force (*Slowly*) So we meet at equal odds after all

MASKELYNE As usual

CLIVE We go round to the back door, Sir—the enemy's back door

GOVERNOR But all this, of course, depends upon whether a message comes from Jaffar?

CLIVE Yes

GOVERNOR And there is none?

CLIVE So far

[*There is a wailing cry of an Indian woman off, a mango seller* CLIVE pricks up his ears *The wailing continues*]

Who is that? Sergeant!

[SERGEANT CLARK appears]

Who is that?

CLARK Nothing, sir Only an old woman selling mangoes Been round all the afternoon She won't go away

[CLIVE catches at the word]

CLIVE Mangoes? Buy the fruit Then watch her to see which way she goes She may be a spy

CLARK Yes, sir (*He hesitates*) But it's queer

CLIVE What is queer?

CLARK The old woman won't sell

CLIVE Eh?

CLARK She wants to have the honour of selling it to the great Sahib himself

MASKELYNE Don't touch it, Bob It may be poisoned

CLIVE Oho ! Bring her in

[The old WOMAN is brought in She salaams, saying, Huzoor " She carries the fruit basket on her head, and now puts it on the ground

Kanh say ayah ? Where do you come from ?

[WOMAN points across the river

I'll buy it all

[She stoops to the basket, and apparently carelessly takes out a pair of heavy Indian slippers as she picks over the fruit

And are these slippers for sale ?

WOMAN *(after a look round)* For the great Sahib

CLIVE Give them to me *(To SERGEANT CLARK)* Pay her well

[The old WOMAN goes out CLIVE bends the shoes backwards and forwards He selects one, calls for a knife, and slits the soles of the shoe There is a message inside

From Jaffar ! *(He reads)* ' Cross the river I will join you at Plassey with thirty thousand troops if I can — if I can ' ' Suraj ud Dowlah suspects I dare not move yet Cross the river — attack — and when I can I will join you ' " When I can '

GOVERNOR Exactly ! A trap

CLIVE *(thinking)* He asks me to cross the river

GOVERNOR The monsoon is about to break It will be madness Once it comes, the swollen river will be behind you and you will be trapped

CLIVE Yes, yes, yes

GOVERNOR May I have a word with you alone please ?

[CLIVE nods The others go

Colonel Clive, I regret I'll have to say this

I myself appreciate your efforts—you have made a magnificent effort—but you must not cross the river

CLIVE I am in command here

GOVERNOR Of the army But my authority is higher

CLIVE You mean

GOVERNOR I mean this If you go on, you go alone, with every man's hand against you If you continue in defiance of my authority, you will have the blood of every man—and woman—on your head I want you to understand that

CLIVE I didn't expect this It is well enough for those fools of the Council to talk, but surely you will see

GOVERNOR No Once the rains come, you will have a roaring flood at your back—escape will be impossible Yes, yes, you will be brave, if you are defeated you'll die—yes—but, if you fail, our population will be massacred—Suraj ud Dowlah's victory will mean, not one Black Hole, but many You are gambling with the lives of us all (*Pointing to MARGARET'S letter*) Even with those of your own wife and child

CLIVE By God, sir, do you think I don't know that? Tell me this—have I ever failed?

GOVERNOR I can't agree to that as an argument But I'll do this the monsoon may not break for two days yet Send a last message to Jaffar Tell him he must come to you before the rains or the treaty is wiped out

CLIVE (*shaking his head*) He is watched The moment he moves they will be upon him

GOVERNOR That is my last word

[*They face each other*]

I shall be returning at once Perhaps you would like to send a message or letter to your wife?

CLIVE I've no time to write, but tell her, if you will *I stand at the crossways*

GOVERNOR (*repeating*) "I stand at the cross-ways"

CLIVE She'll know what I mean—and that I think of her

GOVERNOR I'll give her the message myself
Good night

[He goes out]

CLIVE (*calling*) Walsh—Walsh! (*To sergeant outside*) Call Captain Maskelyne too, please

[WALSH comes in CLIVE speaks in a dead voice, as if it were only force of circumstances that made him give the order]

Send a last message to Jaffar—urge him, tell him I will go no further. He must come to me here—at once—or the treaty is wiped out

[MASKELYNE comes in]

WALSH And our arrangements to cross? Do we cancel them?

CLIVE (*after a pause*) Not yet—let the rafts be ready. The rains may hold off—one must go on—on to the stroke of the clock—before admitting failure

[WALSH goes, and CLIVE is left alone with MASKELYNE]

(*To MASKELYNE*) They're all against me, it seems

MASKELYNE I'm afraid so, Bob

CLIVE Edmund, I am once again that little clerk who used to ask your advice as a friend. I depend upon you. Tell me

MASKELYNE It's hard to say it, but aren't we venturing too much? It would be a great stroke—if it succeeded. But you have Margaret—she has suffered so much already—and if you failed—

CLIVE I understand, Edmund. Before, I've always had you with me—but this time I'm really alone. It's wrong, Edmund, wrong, I shouldn't have to bear this alone. I've lost my

courage I'm listening to reason—to caution , I'm holding back when every instinct tells me to go on—go on India is in my hands (*Pointing to the river*) There—there is the way, if I dared to take it

MASKELYNE Still—

CLIVE (*giving up*) Yes, you're right It's too much to bear alone (*In a low voice*) Edmund, give orders to recall the men from the river (*He sinks down*) And so it ends I've no courage—courage

[MASKELYNE, *after a look out, goes out* CLIVE, *with a gesture, stands facing the river, his hands clenched, muttering* “ ‘ Courage ’—*if there was one single helping hand* ” He thinks of MARGARET'S letter and crosses to where it lies on his table He looks at the letter He opens it, and we hear only fragments of the contents

‘ Bob, they say you are in great danger—they hint terrible things to me here ” (*Suddenly he stiffens as he reads on*) “ Notwithstanding all they say, Bob—do what you must—if you believe it, I will abide by it—and I pray for your success, my dear, my dear ” By God ! that woman stands head and shoulders above us all

[*Outside, there are sounds of orders being given and of movement It has been growing darker slowly*

CLIVE *walks up and down in a fever, with MARGARET'S letter in his hand He sinks down*

There is a pause Then there is a rushing sound of a great wind beginning, and it grows darker and darker

MASKELYNE *comes running in*

MASKELYNE Bob ! Bob ! The monsoon ! It is breaking—listen ! Rain !

CLIVE Rain !

MASKELYNE Before Jaffar can reply, the river will be impassable

CLIVE (*his last hope gone*) Rain ! (*Sharply*) See that the orders are carried out by the troops—get them under cover—see that they use the tarpaulins, for God s sake, and keep the powder dry

[MASKELYNE *goes off*

The rain begins to beat down CLIVE *is alone*

Rain ! Rain ! And I could have India in my hands if (*He looks at his hand, and sees in it the letter from MARGARET*) Give me leave to do what I must

[*He holds his head in his hands, grasping the letter*
He makes his decision *He calls loudly, but remains staring ahead*

Walsh ! Maskelyne ! (WALSH and MASKELYNE and JOHNSTONE *appear hastily*) Cancel the orders ! Recall the messenger ! Strike tents and march ! We cross the river to night Sergeant, rouse them up ! Sound the “Stand to Arms”

MASKELYNE Sir ?

[CLIVE *moves up to the entrance driving the others in front of him*

CLIVE Cross, I say Johnstone, get your guns out now, before the flood comes March light—no baggage Speed Speed

[WALSH and JOHNSTONE *go out quickly*

MASKELYNE You mean ?

CLIVE To the rafts My orders stand—we cross !

[*In the distance the drums begin to beat, the noise of men, of the jingle of arms, and of the wind and the rain, increase in force* *The lightning plays at the hut entrance as CLIVE stands facing the driving rain*

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE I

*Walcot Clive's country home Seven years later
(1764)*

The scene is the sitting room that Margaret has earmarked for their own private use It is a pleasant room overlooking the terrace It is spring

The situation in the house is that, at long last, Margaret has really got her husband at home They are to settle down—adventuring is over All her life she has been waiting for him to keep his promise and give her the home that they have often spoken of and often planned, but always some new task has had to be undertaken, and it has been put off and put off Now, at last, she feels she really has got him home—and she is happy CLIVE himself is content He has been ill—but he is amused at the moment by planning an estate so extensive that, if he buys much more land, his borders will reach London—a hundred miles away

All we see at the moment, when the curtain rises, is a housekeeper, MRS CLIFFORD, drumming impatiently on the table with her fingers, and looking as if an outburst of temper or hysteria is imminent With her is BETTY, a slow speaking country maid with a strong and pleasant country accent

MRS CLIFFORD It's no use my giving you instructions, Betty, ask my Lady Clive

BETTY But she ask me to ask you, Mrs Clifford

MRS CLIFFORD What's the use when every thing I say is contradicted, and everything I do is changed

BETTY Oh, Mrs Clifford—tis just her way—she is like a young girl with her first home Why, they do say she looks ten years younger since she came down to Walcot—you'd never think she was a middle aged woman of thirty

[Old George, a farm bailiff, appears at the windows He is completely bewildered, and very agitated]

What is it, George ?

GEORGE Be the master here ?

BETTY What do you want with him, George ?

GEORGE I want to ax him—danged if I know what I want to ax him, now 'Tis so many things he do say, and so many orders he give—'tis ten men's job to mind them

BETTY New masters, George, new ways

GEORGE Ay—he may be my Lord Clive of Plassey—he may know summat about this 'ere India—but he don't know nothing about this 'ere estate

BETTY He knows enough to get some work out of you at last, George

GEORGE Ay, but he wants everything so quick—he seem to think that, now he's master here, the sheep can grow two coats a year, and trees and avenues spring up in the night Nature's agin it—and I up and says so

BETTY (*awed*) You did ? What did my Lord Clive say ?

GEORGE Nowt He weren't there when I said it

[MARGARET comes in—she is busy, and happily worried over household affairs She sees at once that CLIVE'S chair is empty and the shawl on the ground]

MARGARET There ! Where is Lord Clive ? Find him, George—ask him to come here—he shouldn't be out—take his wrap to him—I'm sure he is not wearing his thick vest

[GEORGE takes the wrap, and goes off]

MARGARET *calls after him*

And see that he actually puts it on

[MARGARET turns to MRS CLIFFORD, and is

once again the complete happy housewife All the following little items are stressed as if they were the most important things in the world

Mrs Clifford—I found a much better place for the linen—of course, the cupboard over the stairs ! Take these, Betty, and tell Mary she must be more careful with the silk shirts—the iron was too hot Oh, and, Betty, have a look at baby—the cat has a habit of jumping on his cot Martha must be more careful—the poor mite would be suffocated I'm always terrified of that Oh, and the apple store wants picking over—I've been up there myself Oh, and tell Mary no, I'll tell her myself (*She puts several things on the table, and takes out a notebook as she says, without looking up*) What are you doing, Mrs Clifford—surely this isn't a time for sitting down ?

MRS CLIFFORD There is nothing for me to do, my lady

[MARGARET *looks up, surprised*

I can see your ladyship has no further need of my services

MARGARET Mrs Clifford ?

MRS CLIFFORD I can make arrangements to leave as soon as convenient

MARGARET (*firing up a little*) To leave ? Very well—if you wish it I want no unhappy people here

[MRS CLIFFORD, *with a stiff curtesy, is sweeping out, when MARGARET suddenly repents, and goes to her impulsively*

Mrs Clifford

[MRS CLIFFORD *stops*

Come, if I'm exacting, if I interfere, you must forgive me

MRS CLIFFORD (*non-committally*) My lady

MARGARET (*simply*) It's such a joy to be planning a home that is at last to be a home I love

it all so—I want to do everything myself—you must bear with me

MRS CLIFFORD (*overcome*) I—I—my lady—I'll do anything—anything for you—but you will wear yourself out

MARGARET (*quietly*) This will never wear me out Dear Mrs Clifford, how could you be so cross with me ?

MRS CLIFFORD (*sniffing audibly*) I only felt—I was no longer wanted

MARGARET Not wanted ? Why, how could I do without you ?

[MRS CLIFFORD *is quite overcome at this, and mops her eyes*

Listen, I'll let you into a secret—I'm going to re plan this room entirely

MRS CLIFFORD (*from her handkerchief*) The one room we really *have* got straight ?

MARGARET (*eagerly*) Yes, yes—but listen, we'll plan it together This room will be for Lord Clive and myself a little room all to ourselves and I want *you* to arrange for all the furniture from our old room in Queen's Square to come here

MRS CLIFFORD My lady ? What, all that old stuff ?

MARGARET Yes There're some things one always loves best—the first—the things of one's youth No one knows about this—not even my husband It's to be a surprise Will you help me ? I'm forgiven ?

[MRS CLIFFORD *nods, and smiles through her tears*

MRS CLIFFORD My lady

MARGARET There (*She kisses her to console her*) No one must be unhappy here

[MRS CLIFFORD *goes*

MARGARET, *now happy again, goes about the*

room doing the little jobs that every woman can find to do She picks over her work box—there are baby's clothes to see to—the footstool to be adjusted ready for my lord She is singing as she hears CLIVE's voice outside the window

CLIVE comes in with the SURVEYOR Even though he is now retired, and is on his country estate, CLIVE still retains the manner of planning a campaign, and talks to the SURVEYOR as if he were a chief staff officer His clothes, however, are easy and comfortable OLD GEORGE is doing his best to keep the wrap round his master's shoulders, but CLIVE takes no notice, and throws his shoulders back, and the wrap keeps falling off

CLIVE Then you'll see to it? At once You people in the country are too slow for me—two thousand acres—oh, they'll sell Plans for the new outhouses by to-morrow?

[The SURVEYOR is taken aback

Well, Thursday then—get it done

[GEORGE puts shawl round CLIVE, who pushes it off, and says, 'Don't do that!']

He suddenly notices MARGARET, and feels guilty, and rather like a naughty schoolboy

MARGARET comes up to him, takes the wrap from GEORGE, who is still trying to keep it on his master's shoulders dismisses the SURVEYOR and GEORGE with a nod They withdraw MARGARET stands looking at CLIVE

MARGARET (as she puts her hand to his collar to feel what he is wearing) You're not wearing your thick vest

CLIVE (humbly) My dear—the sun

MARGARET The air's still cold—no coat—no wrap—and this morning I left you looking like a sick baby

[MARGARET leads him gently to the chair, sits him down, wraps the shawl round him, puts his feet on the stool, and converts him into the complete invalid CLIVE suffers this

I ll get the compress for your head

CLIVE No, not that—your hands, if you like
I'm tired of the compress, and with being an
invalid

*[She puts her hands on his forehead—he relaxes
at once, with a thankful sigh There is a pause
while her fingers massage his forehead]*

(Looking up at her) You like to have me at your
mercy, don t you ?

MARGARET Bob

CLIVE Well, you have your wish—here I am—
on the shelf—

MARGARET Bob !

CLIVE *(as she eases his cushions, he sinks back)*
Well, if I m to be a cabbage—I'll be a
comfortable cabbage

*[He is now the complete invalid MARGARET draws
the stool to his feet, as if it were a constant habit,
and sits beside him They look a comfortable middle
aged pair of married people CLIVE looks down at
her, and makes a familiar gesture of laying his hand
on her shoulder But suddenly his eyes begin to roam,
and a cunning look comes into them]*

(Very innocently) Where's Walsh ?

MARGARET My dear, you know, he went to
London two days ago

CLIVE Oh, yes—yes *(He looks to see if his
little hypocrisy has been successful)*

MARGARET Why did he go ?

CLIVE *(still very innocently)* Some business of his
own—a woman, perhaps

MARGARET *(seeing through this)* Bob—did you
send him ?

CLIVE Me ? Send him ? Why should I ?

MARGARET You are not still hankering after—
news ?

CLIVE *(still all innocence)* News ?

MARGARET (*with a catch in her breath*) Of London—of India——

CLIVE Why do you dislike that word ?

MARGARET Please God I never hear it again !

CLIVE (*grimly*) It's likely to crop up in the news, I understand

MARGARET (*quickly*) Understand—from whom ?

CLIVE Eh ? Oh, just talk

MARGARET (*looks at him searchingly, and then turns away*) We've done with all that, haven't we ? Haven't we, Bob ?

CLIVE (*agreeing quickly*) Yes, my dear, yes Let India look after itself—let Sullivan run the Company—and that young pup Burgoyne—let them all go hang—India has had the best years of my life

[MARGARET stops him

MARGARET No The best years are to come

CLIVE To come ? But we are old—I'm thirty-eight

MARGARET (*thoughtfully*) To me all that we have striven for has been so that one day we shall have—this You have achieved everything a man can—wealth, honour, a nation's gratitude—surely, then, the best years are to come

CLIVE (*touched*) It's a woman's point of view

MARGARET And the man ?

CLIVE Will do what he can

[CLIVE pats her hand

BETTY comes in, and announces “ Mr Wedderburn and Captain George ” MARGARET is at once alarmed at this intrusion

MARGARET Wedderburn ?

[MARGARET looks at CLIVE, who, in turn, looks extremely innocent

CLIVE My dear, just callers—a pity, of course

MARGARET Who is this Captain George ?

CLIVE (*with a shrug*) Some young fellow seeking preferment Come, come, welcome them
(*To BETTY*) Show them in

[*BETTY goes out*]

MARGARET *looks at CLIVE searchingly*
My dear—what is it ?

MARGARET They're from London—they bring news—I see, always, India in the background

CLIVE Nonsense—Wedderburn, an old friend, on his way to his brother's estate

BETTY Mr Wedderburn and Captain George

[*They come in* CAPTAIN GEORGE *is a pleasant plump young fellow—very ill at ease at the moment, and very deferential to CLIVE* MARGARET *looks at them, obviously a little hostile* *She prevents CLIVE from rising* They greet MR WEDDERBURN presents CAPTAIN GEORGE to MARGARET and to CLIVE

MARGARET (*looking at him*) Captain George ? You're sunburnt, sir You come, perhaps, from—India ?

CAPTAIN GEORGE (*awkwardly*) Yes, yes—I've been out there

MARGARET (*deliberately*) And when did you get back ?

CAPTAIN GEORGE (*fencing*) Er—recently——

MARGARET Very recently ?

CAPTAIN GEORGE Er—yes

MARGARET When ?

CAPTAIN GEORGE Er—yesterday

[*MARGARET looks at him, and at CLIVE—who catches her eye* WEDDERBURN and CLIVE *hurriedly make conversation*]

MARGARET (*to WEDDERBURN*) You'll remember that my husband is still an invalid He mustn't talk too much

[*WEDDERBURN and CAPTAIN GEORGE both*

protest that they will fall in with her wishes There is a pause They obviously wait for her to go But MARGARET deliberately sits down, and takes up her needlework CLIVE and WEDDERBURN look at each other

CLIVE Meg, my dear—will you see to some refreshment ?

[WEDDERBURN is about to refuse when he sees CLIVE's motive But MARGARET deliberately gets up, and rings the bell CLIVE tries again

Meg, my dear, don't leave it to the servants—the wine—my Tokay, needs care—I laid it down myself, they won't know where to find it

MARGARET John can find it

CLIVE Well, then—I must go myself (*He makes an effort to go*)

MARGARET No, no—I'll go No, please, Bob, you mustn't go to the cold cellars

[She moves out

The moment she has gone, CLIVE is obviously impatient to hear WEDDERBURN's news

CLIVE Well—well

WEDDERBURN I brought Captain George along He knows the situation Here is a written report

[CLIVE takes it, and folds it up, and conceals it
All that we feared—and worse

CLIVE In brief—what ?

WEDDERBURN (*slowly*) India, Bob is as it was Plassey might never have been fought It is as if you had never been to India

[CLIVE remains stunned for a moment He looks from WEDDERBURN to CAPTAIN GEORGE, who nods agreement

All those you trusted and put in authority have been dismissed

CLIVE Dismissed ?

WEDDERBURN You don't realise, Bob—every director of the East India Company has sons, nephews, relations, friends—and the country is cluttered up with them They scramble for gold

[CLIVE *looks round at* CAPTAIN GEORGE

CAPTAIN GEORGE Yes, sir—they are all trading in monopolies, not for the Company, but for their own benefit but they sell the same monopoly over and over again, until the natives no longer trust the word of an Englishman

CLIVE But Vansittart the Governor ?

WEDDERBURN He is too weak to help them Jaffar has been dethroned—a boy as evil as Suraj ud Dowlah is installed

CLIVE (*after a pause*) I was right—I implored His Majesty—I begged Pitt that the Government should take over It's too big a project for a private company we've no right there, Wedderburn, unless we justify ourselves India should be a sacred trust

WEDDERBURN And Pitt said ?

CLIVE (*gloomily*) England had other fish to fry (*Thinking*) So now India is as though I'd never been there I tell you, Wedderburn—hush, not a word of this before Lady Clive

[MARGARET *comes back with a* SERVANT *bearing the wine on a tray* The SERVANT *retires*

Thank you, thank you

[MARGARET *shows no sign of leaving* There is a pause They obviously want MARGARET to go My dear—I feel rested Perhaps, Wedderburn, you'd like to see round the estate ?

WEDDERBURN (*seeing his motive*) Charmed

MARGARET I'll go with you

[*This defeats them*

CLIVE And yet—after all, as you've so little time, Wedderburn

MARGARET (*coldly*) Won't he stay ?

WEDDERBURN (*hurriedly*) No—I thank you—we're on our way to my brother's estate

[*There is another pause*

MARGARET *calmly picks up her work, and reseats herself*

MRS CLIFFORD *comes in*

MRS CLIFFORD (*to MARGARET*) My lady, the child is awake She's fretting for you

MARGARET She must wait

[*There is a loud bump outside, as if a child has fallen There are several adult voices raised at once, and BETTY is heard saying*

BETTY How did she get on the stairs at all ? There, there, then etc

[*This is too much for MARGARET—she drops her work, and leaves*

CLIVE (*when she has gone*) Quickly now——

WEDDERBURN The hardest part is to come These fellows use your name to excuse their depredations

CLIVE Mine ? How ?

CAPTAIN GEORGE You see, sir—they think you obtained great wealth out there—so why not others ?

CLIVE My God !

CAPTAIN GEORGE My lord—I don't know the circumstances They quote you continually

CLIVE Is there no difference between a gift from a king, with the full knowledge and approval of the Company, and the wholesale swindling of traders ?

CAPTAIN GEORGE Yes, yes, my lord—that explains everything

WEDDERBURN The Company gave its approval of Jaffar's gift to you ?

CLIVE Certainly An official of the Company was present when the gift was made Captain

George, oblige me by keeping near that door in case anyone comes

WEDDERBURN Matters are so bad that the Company is alarmed—the shareholders clamour for the country to be cleared, and for the dismissal of those responsible—with one accord they turn to you

[CLIVE swells at the thought Then he remembers, and picks at MARGARET's work box idly He shakes his head

You'll have an absolute free hand—very different to your last situation—sole command—

CLIVE If I go—and I can't—I'll establish a rule—an absolute veto on private trading—no gifts—nothing I'll take nothing myself—not even a gift—I'll pay my own costs

WEDDERBURN Then ?

CLIVE I can't go—there are reasons now

WEDDERBURN I know I've come to plead with my Lady Clive

CLIVE Don't—don't hint at it I'll try My God, I'll try ! But I shall be ashamed to look her in the face A child died because of India—another child died because we delayed the return home—there is to be another in a few months Can one ask it of any woman ? And then—(*indicating the room*)—she's like a child herself, with her new home

[*They look at each other*

WEDDERBURN It's for you to say

[CAPTAIN GEORGE indicates that someone is coming

CLIVE (*hurriedly*) Tempourise Wedderburn, give me a week, but full powers, mind—full powers—my God, I'd clear that country !

WEDDERBURN It'd be better to take our leave now Our presence makes things awkward, for already Lady Clive suspects our mission

[WEDDERBURN and CAPTAIN GEORGE go out
CLIVE is left alone He studies the report, muttering
to himself The SURVEYOR appears at the window
SURVEYOR My lord

CLIVE (*over his shoulder*) Eh ? Another time—
another time

SURVEYOR (*perplexed*) But, my lord, I under-
stood it was urgent

CLIVE Urgent ? No Another time, I tell you

[MARGARET has come in, and hears this

MARGARET (*sharply*) Why ?

CLIVE Eh ? (*He quickly conceals the paper*)

MARGARET Why is anything to do with the
estate no longer so urgent ?

CLIVE Why, one moment you say, " Rest—
peace—quiet "—and yet another you plead
urgency

[MARGARET and CLIVE look at each other She
dismisses the SURVEYOR with a nod He goes MAR-
GARET has sensed trouble She knows what is coming,
but she staves it off, and plays her last card In the
following scene she does all she can to keep him at
home by dwelling on the plans she has made

MARGARET Now look at you—is this the man
of peace ?—Come

[*She puts the shawl round him again, but, obviously,
it irks him She draws up the stool again, and attempts
to bring him back to earth*

There're so many things I want to talk to you
about It'll take five years before that avenue
of poplars, you've planned, begins to show—five
years—Edward will be seventeen—he ll need a
firm hand Fortunately, you'll be here It's good
to plan ahead, don't you think, Bob ? To plan
a house—an estate—to see it grow, and to feel
that it'll last

CLIVE Yes, yes

MARGARET Now for my secret What do you think ? Are you listening

CLIVE (*comes back with a jerk*) Yes, yes

MARGARET Are you interested in my secret ? This room is all going to be changed—it's going to be *our* room, Bob—nobody else's Why, I will call it that—the " Nobody Else's Room "—are you listening ?

CLIVE Yes, yes— Nobody Else s

MARGARET Do you like the idea ? It ll be shut off with double doors—and here, only two will be allowed to come—you and me Oh, I love the children, and my friends too, but this is to be a corner withdrawn Here, you belong to nobody but me—in the Nobody Else s Room

[She looks anxiously to see if this has made an impression]

CLIVE (*starting*) Charming—charming

MARGARET And I've another surprise It s going to be refurnished entirely—how do you think ?

CLIVE New style ? That fellow Chippendale—new fangled shape—but good

MARGARET No (*She puts down her work*) I'm going to use all those things from our room in Queen s Square, our first home, Bob Oh, I know they won't fit—they re awkward and clumsy—for we didn't know good things then—but it was our first home—the home where I first came to know you

CLIVE But

MARGARET I know it's very sentimental, Bob, but you must put up with it You see, I ve wandered so long from place to place Oh, you ve been wonderful—I've had every comfort, but this—this is what I have been longing for It was your first promise to me—and the only one I have ever held you to—that at last we should find something like this

CLIVE Yes (*He stirs uneasily*)

[MARGARET is watching him—watching him Behind her words there is a certain breathlessness from her anxiety to keep him—to say something that will keep him at home She feels she is losing, and now becomes a little hysterical in her appeal]

MARGARET You see, Bob, don't you? You understand? All our old things—your old chair—you'll never get another like it—that ugly old bureau—it'll go over there—the quaint side-piece we meant to get rid of for years—it'll fit there It'll look just like the old room—even your old stool, I'll re cover it—it'll all seem to us like that room where we used to plan our final retirement to the country—you remember, Bob, planning it? Then we shall have everything round us—everything, shan't we?

[CLIVE remains inert He cannot respond She can bear it no longer, and begins, breathlessly, to accuse] You don't answer? You're not pleased? Perhaps you no longer want this home? You've other plans, better ones

[He looks up and stares at her, and she looks into his eyes]

Say it—say it I know, it must come India, India

CLIVE I've said nothing

MARGARET (*still reading him*) And do we need to say these things—you and I? Can't I read you like a book? Don't I know that I was a fool to expect your promise to be kept? You've been planning, scheming, to go back—it's India—India again

CLIVE (*his words tumbling over themselves*) Margaret—the country is in ruins the natives are in arms

MARGARET What's that to do with me?

CLIVE I beg you to listen—my life's work is gone

MARGARET You shan't go I've given my life for India It has taken two of my children—they're dead—dead—for what ?

CLIVE Meg, you mustn't excite yourself like this—remember your state

MARGARET What does that matter ? What are children to you ?

CLIVE Margaret !

MARGARET And I—what do I matter ? You talk of love—but a breath of the word India, and away it goes

CLIVE I have a duty——

MARGARET Duty ? To enrich the East India Company—to make more millions for them—and what can they do for you ?—more riches—an English peerage instead of an Irish And, when all's said and done, you'll still have to live—and for what ?

CLIVE Meg, I must keep faith——

MARGARET You'll keep faith with them well enough—but with me—oh no Like a gambler, you'll pay anything but your honest debts

CLIVE I'll call Mrs Clifford—at this time you must not——

MARGARET Yes, yes, yes—call them to take an hysterical woman out of your way—out of sight, out of mind

CLIVE Come

MARGARET I have a right, I tell you—a right

[She suddenly stops her hysteria, and there is a stillness She stands looking straight ahead]

You'll go

[CLIVE makes a movement to go to her]

But this time you go alone

CLIVE Alone ?

MARGARET Yes, alone You'll go without a

prayer from any of us, and without a loving thought Your child will be born here—you go, and you go alone

[CLIVE *makes an appeal She takes no notice*
Whatever success you may have will end in disaster

CLIVE (*smiling*) Margaret, my dear, how can success be disaster?

MARGARET It will come

[*He picks up her hand, and kisses it, hoping the moment has come to make peace*

You kissed my hand like that before—at our first meeting, and you said—oh, I remember it —“ May the end, when it comes, be like this ”
This is the end

[*He drops her hand She moves to the door, and goes out CLIVE is left alone He looks at the official report in his hand*

CURTAIN

SCENE II

A corridor in the House of Commons, nine years later

CLIVE *has returned from India He has swept away the abuses that were ruining the country, established law and order But all those he dismissed for wholesale robbery have got back before him and began a campaign against him His enemies are now packing the House of Commons to pass a vote of censure on my Lord Clive of Plassey*

During the short interval after the Walcot scene the murmurs begin, and grow in volume until the curtain rises

There is confusion, noise on the stage, and distant murmurs of the angry House of Commons swell the noise The scene resembles that of the hustings rather than the House of Commons All the members are at the highest pitch of excitement The attendants try to keep back the crowd at the doorway

In the foreground a big member is simply pounding on a friend's shoulder and shouting with great joy

1ST MEMBER Fox tore him to ribbons !

2ND MEMBER We've got him down at last

1ST MEMBER (*roaring*) Hey ? This time my Lord Clive returns from India with no fatted calf ready for him, eh ?

[A 3RD MEMBER runs up, grips his arm, and shouts

3RD MEMBER We'll get the vote of censure ?

1ST MEMBER We've packed the House—it's certain, certain

[Noise, murmurs, grow as doors open Several come through and pass quickly across The group splits up
A 4TH MEMBER at the same time runs in, grips the 1ST MEMBER, and shouts

4TH MEMBER I've routed out a few more

1ST MEMBER Good—good (*He catches a passer by*) Hear that ? Yes, we've dragged the sick and dying from their beds

5TH MEMBER So long as they vote !

[The noise grows again

1ST MEMBER (*shouting*) Get them all into the House——

Search the ante rooms

Fetch them all in

Pack the House

OTHERS Don't leave it to chance

Take the vote now

Keep the Government out of India

[Leave it to the Company

[A concerted movement leaves an irascible OLD MAN dancing with exasperation

OLD MAN Sir—has the House gone mad ?

1ST MEMBER No Sane at last

[Laughter from the others

OLD MAN I can't get sense out of anybody—
I don't even know which way to vote

1ST MEMBER Do you want your dividends
reduced ?

OLD MAN (*screaming*) Good God, no !

1ST MEMBER Then support the vote of censure
on my Lord Clive

[*At the back, WEDDERBURN pushes through the crowd, who make way but look round and murmur at him. He is just in time to hear the last two lines, and now comes quickly to the OLD MAN and speaks urgently to him, but at the others of the group*

WEDDERBURN (*v hemently*) Sir, it's not true
My Lord Clive has been to India for five years,
at the risk of his health and at his own expense
—he has cleared the country and given the East
India Company three new provinces and
revenue they never dreamed of

[*There are murmurs and snorts of contempt*

OLD MAN Then—then why all this ?

WEDDERBURN Because, sir, all those he found
robbing the country he dismissed (*The snorts of
contempt continue*) They were able to return
home first and create this monstrous cam-
paign of lies against him

OTHERS { The man's mad
Don't believe it
Ruin the Company

OLD MAN What *am* I to believe ?

WEDDERBURN Now they are censuring him for
accepting Mir Jaffar's gift after Plassey, sixteen
years ago, and are trying to strip him of his
honour and leave him penniless It's infamous

1ST MEMBER (*to the OLD MAN*) Don't believe a
word of it

WEDDERBURN Sir, I beg you to listen—ask my
Lord Chatham

[*THE OTHERS take the OLD MAN away, saying
"No use talking to Chatham—come with us," etc*

A crescendo CHATHAM comes through the crowd with MASKELYNE

CHATHAM comes to WEDDERBURN *Though an old man, CHATHAM is also under the influence of the prevailing excitement*

CHATHAM (*vehemently*) I knew it ! It will come to impeachment in the end

MASKELYNE It's terrible (*Using MARGARET'S words of the previous scene*) Who could foresee that his success could end in disaster ?

CHATHAM I told him—I *told* him what would happen if he advised His Majesty that the Government should take over India I told him the East India Company would pack the House against him Now—look at the pack

[OLD HARDCASTLE comes through quickly, shouting]

HARDCASTLE I may be old—I may be feeble—but I'll vote A monster, sir, a monster !

[*Crescendo of noise again Crowd opens out Silence CLIVE comes through The murmurs begin again* HARDCASTLE meets him]

You're a scoundrel, sir, and if I were a younger man, I'd call you out

CLIVE (*firmly*) If you were a younger man, sir, you wouldn't dare

[*Murmurs—"Get them into the House—leave him with his cronies—come on—he won't escape—vote of censure, impeachment," etc*

They go through the doors There is comparative silence Two attendants, now the rush is over, take their places calmly, and remain stationary during the next scene

WEDDERBURN (*taking CLIVE by the arm*) Take no notice, Bob Your speech was magnificent It told

[CLIVE shakes his head He is obviously exhausted He puts his hand on MASKELYNE'S shoulder and gasps out]

CLIVE I must go home, Edmund

MASKELYNE Won't you let me send for Margaret ?

CLIVE Margaret ? (*Quietly*) No, thank you , she prefers to be at Walcot

MASKELYNE But, Bob—I know things have never been the same since you left for India But she ll come if you ask

CLIVE (*huskily*) She's better at Walcot There's no need to send for her now, in the midst of my humiliation

MASKELYNE Bob, can't you tell me what it is ?

CLIVE No man can serve two masters, especially when one is a woman Why had I to wait for this ? A dozen times, Edmund—a bullet, a knife—an inch or so one way or the other and Robert Clive would have been buried with honour It s a great mistake for a soldier to live too long

MASKELYNE You re going home to Berkeley Square

[CLIVE *nods*

You won t wait for the result of the vote in the House ?

CLIVE I can't my head is bursting I can't give way here I must go home—home

WEDDERBURN (*kindly*) Bob, you can t stay in that huge house at Berkeley Square by yourself Go to my house My wife will sit up with you, and I ll bring you the news It s not a time for anyone to be alone

CLIVE I thank you But I am alone That is ungrateful—I've two friends One of you will bring me the news of how the vote has gone ?

[*They nod* CLIVE *suddenly thinks of something*
I shall be at Queen's Square

MASKELYNE Your old house ?

CLIVE Yes I ve a fancy for it Good night

[*He braces himself up and walks away*
WEDDERBURN (*to MASKELYNE*) He'll break down—he's had these hysterical fits lately I've seen him weeping like a child

MASKELYNE He misses Margaret terribly

[WEDDERBURN *nods*

I didn't think there was so much bitterness in her

WEDDERBURN Does she believe these stories they spread about him ?

MASKELYNE No—it's not that

WEDDERBURN Then what is it ?

MASKELYNE Who can tell ? One can't ask One can't pry into the lives of people who have been so much to each other It's heart breaking when you think of his great days

[*There is a sudden entrance of several people talking loudly, and one is heard to say Vansittart has thrown him over—a most bitter speech Why don't they take the vote now ? We have him*

They go off, and MASKELYNE and WEDDERBURN move to follow them

CURTAIN

SCENE III

The house at Queen's Square, the same night

The room as in Act II, Scene I

The BUTLER is taking off covers from the furniture frantically, and an austere HOUSEKEEPER is trying to make the fire blaze Both of them are in a state of agitation, and the following dialogue is spoken in a hurried undertone as they go about their jobs quickly

BUTLER Is the fire alight in the bedroom ?

HOUSEKEEPER Yes—I lit that first

BUTLER The warming pan—is it in ?

HOUSEKEEPER Yes Does he still have his gruel ?

BUTLER God knows And the brandy is low

HOUSEKEEPER I *told* you

BUTLER Quiet

HOUSEKEEPER He might have given us more notice

BUTLER Notice ? His orders have always been that the place must be ready——

HOUSEKEEPER He hasn't been here for years

BUTLER It is not our place to question

HOUSEKEEPER Aren't there enough rooms in his huge house in Berkeley Square that he must come here—and without warning ?

BUTLER Just a fancy, I suppose

*[There is a ring at the bell, peremptory, furious
The BUTLER runs off]*

The HOUSEKEEPER redoubles her efforts to get things straight—folds up dust sheets, sweeps the hearth, puts chairs quite right

CLIVE totters in with the help of the BUTLER. They stand and wait helplessly. CLIVE says nothing, but looks round the room, and we understand he is noting the items we have established before as belonging to his early associations with MARGARET

He turns and looks at the picture of LADY CLIVE by Gainsborough. At last he becomes aware of the others

CLIVE I'll sit here

BUTLER Shall I bring the chair near the fire, sir ?

CLIVE Leave it A shawl

BUTLER Shawl ?

[They look at each other]

Shall I get you a rug ?

CLIVE Anything

BUTLER Something hot for you, my lord ?

CLIVE Yes—no—what you will (*He looks round*) That work box—it should be there

[*They move it hurriedly*

The stool has been moved

BUTLER Yes, my lord, to sweep

CLIVE Move it back It should be here

BUTLER Yes, sir Your bedroom is prepared

CLIVE I shan't need it

BUTLER Not need it ?

CLIVE I remain in here

BUTLER All night, my lord ?

CLIVE I expect a messenger from the House of Commons When he comes, admit him at once—at once—no delay You'll keep near the door—all night, don't lose a moment

BUTLER I'm to wake you, sir ?

CLIVE There'll be no need to wake me

[*The BUTLER goes out*

CLIVE *is alone He sits in his chair—clumsily pulls the rug round him It will not go round his shoulders properly, as we saw the shawl used to go He looks down at MARGARET'S place beside him—he almost makes a gesture with which we are now familiar He tries to open a bottle on the side table, but the opening is too stiff—he wishes to ring—it is too much trouble to move—and he feels, "What's the use?" He sits looking round the room, thinking There is a faint ring He looks up Presently the BUTLER comes in, saying*

BUTLER My lord—it is my Lady Clive

CLIVE (*mastering his surprise*) What ? Of course, of course Tell her I'm in here

[*The BUTLER goes off*

CLIVE *braces himself to make a show He throws*

away the rug and stands before the fire in an attitude of the master of his own house

MARGARET comes in *She is uncertain for a moment, seeing him like this—then comes slowly to him, until she is quite close*

Under stress of his emotion, he speaks almost brusquely, and with forced cheerfulness

CLIVE Margaret ? What's happened ? Nothing wrong at Walcot ? The children not ill ? Come, come—speak—some difficulty perhaps ?

[They look at each other for a long time until CLIVE's shoulders begin to round with the strain]

She puts out her hand He takes it, bends over it—and falls at her feet

Margaret—I'm in agony—we're lost—they'll strip us of everything—they cry after me in the street You were right ! Oh, God ! you were right !

[Slowly he recovers, and mutters]

Take no notice, I have these fits—the weakness of a moment——

[She assists him to his chair He sinks into it She puts her hands on his forehead He is quieter, but his whole body is shaking]

She wraps him in the rug as we have seen before at Walcot

They are now no longer my lord and lady, but just two people who have come together after a long standing quarrel

CLIVE You know my need

MARGARET I always know

CLIVE *(after a pause)* The children feel it ?

MARGARET *(quietly)* They don't go out much People are so cruel

[She sits quietly beside him, as we have seen her sit before]

CLIVE It's this waiting—waiting (*Suddenly he turns to her*) Yet you have waited before like this—yes, many times—you must have waited—for news

[MARGARET *nods* *She is thinking of those times*

MARGARET Yes Plassey was the worst

CLIVE How did the news come ?

MARGARET For three days I waited A native came first He said simply Clive Sahib is master of all

CLIVE And you ?

MARGARET I just went on preparing the child's food, and it wasn't till some minutes later that I realised what it meant, then a great peace came upon me—a peace that settles on you, and you hear yourself repeating 'It's all right, it's all right, over and over again

CLIVE A long road, Meg, we've travelled together And all this came out of a little locket—a letter from a poor clerk at five pounds a year What made you come out to a total stranger without hope or prospects ? I wrote you that

MARGARET Why, it was just that—your need of me was so great It was a terrible letter, Bob—it cried out

CLIVE The impudence of it ! What courage one has—in youth Our first meeting, you remember ? Did you imagine me anything like that ?

MARGARET I was too alarmed at seeing you at all You were so hot and dusty

CLIVE My hands were dirty—I remember How uncouth I must have seemed—yet you kissed me That was courage

MARGARET Of youth

CLIVE Twenty years ago A rough road, Meg—and now we wait here—for what may be the end

MARGARET No We'll go back to Walcot

CLIVE We shan't have it

MARGARET Then we'll have this—(*indicating the room*)—or will that go too?

CLIVE They'll take our lands—wealth—my honour—everything

MARGARET Then we've only—this (*She puts her hand on his*)

[CLIVE *nods*

CLIVE And is this—all that I promised you?

MARGARET All

CLIVE (*repeating to himself*) All

[*He turns to her She is crying quietly*

MARGARET Nothing else matters?

CLIVE Nothing (*Suddenly he hears a noise in the street*) What's that? (*Immediately he is back to earth again*) It might be the news No—it's gone by——

[MARGARET *smiles Nothing else mattered, but at the first sign of the news he has forgotten her*

Why do you smile like that?

MARGARET You are such a man

CLIVE Why—how——?

MARGARET You can't help it, dear We'll wait

[*She makes him comfortable so that he can doze There is a pause Suddenly he sits up There is a ring at the bell downstairs The tension immediately begins to grow*

The BUTLER enters

BUTLER Lord Chatham is below, sir

CLIVE (*surprised*) Chatham! Ask him up at once

[BUTLER *goes out*

CLIVE *looks at* MARGARET

Chatham ? Matters go badly when he's afoot at this hour

MARGARET Will it mean so much to you ?

CLIVE I can't lie, Meg

[CHATHAM *comes in*

CHATHAM My Lady Clive (*He bows to her*)

MARGARET My husband asks you to forgive him rising——

CHATHAM Please The House did not rise until six, and His Majesty requested Lord North to go to him I took the liberty of following him unasked His Majesty was gracious enough to see me as well I begged Wedderburn to let me bring you the news myself

[CLIVE *nods They wait for the result, but*
CHATHAM *continues keeping them in suspense*

Towards the end of the session the debate was, perhaps, the most acrimonious I have ever heard At least a dozen duels are promised

[CLIVE *tries to speak and ask the question*

As I was afraid, Fox and Burgoyne carried the House

[CLIVE *grips his chair*

But your supporters made up for their lack of numbers by the fury of their invective

[MARGARET *sees that CLIVE can bear it no longer*

MARGARET Will your lordship kindly—tell us ?

CHATHAM You won't require the actual wording, but in general I regret to say that the House condemned the conduct of my Lord Clive of Plassey in respect of the accusation brought forward

[CLIVE's *hands drop*

But *grudgingly* they conceded that " Lord Clive had at the same time rendered great services to his country "

MARGARET Meaning ?

CHATHAM I think your fortune is safe, my lord

CLIVE And my honour ?

CHATHAM You must consider it intact

[He offers his hand, and CLIVE takes it quietly]

One good thing may arise Your long wished for dream may come true Your recent revelations may force His Majesty's Government to step in and govern India If we accept the responsibility of India, we must give it colour by governing So far it is merely a dream, but it is coming

[CLIVE nods his appreciation]

(More kindly) His Majesty, in private, asked me to convey a message to you

CLIVE His Majesty ?

CHATHAM King George desires me to say that he remembers with gratitude that you have added a great new Dominion to the Empire

[He stands holding CLIVE'S hand CLIVE is too overcome to look up It is more than he expected His body rocks silently and his head nods slowly his appreciation]

CHATHAM *moves out*

The door clicks MARGARET makes a movement to bring the rug over his shoulders, but CLIVE remains, as before, overwhelmed

CURTAIN

THE WIND AND THE RAIN

Merton Hodge

THE WIND AND THE RAIN

A Play
In Three Acts

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To
MY MOTHER

CHARACTERS

(in order of their appearance)

MRS MCFIE
GILBERT RAYMOND
JOHN WILLIAMS
CHARLES TRITTON
DR PAUL DUHAMEL
ANNE HARGREAVES
JILL MANNERING
ROGER COLE
PETER MORGAN

SCENES

The entire action of the play takes place in the students' study at Mrs McFie's house in a Scottish university city

ACT I

SCENE I An evening in mid September, about seven p m

SCENE II Three weeks later It is late afternoon

ACT II

SCENE I Two and a half years later About seven p m

SCENE II The same evening, ten p m

ACT III

SCENE I It is two years later Time is four thirty p m

SCENE II Four weeks later About seven p m

THE WIND AND THE RAIN was first produced at the Opera House, Manchester, on October 9th, 1933, and subsequently at St Martin's Theatre, London, on October 18th, 1933, with the following cast

<i>Mrs McFie</i>	MARGARET MOFFAT
<i>Gilbert Raymond</i>	MACKENZIE WARD
<i>John Williams</i>	IVAN BRANDT
<i>Charles Tritton</i>	ROBERT HARRIS
<i>Dr Paul Duhamel</i>	GEORGE DE WARFAZ
<i>Anne Hargreaves</i>	CELIA JOHNSON
<i>Jill Mannering</i>	JUDY GUNN
<i>Roger Cole</i>	HARGRAVE PAWSON
<i>Peter Morgan</i>	KENNETH VILLIERS

Directed by AURIOL LEE

ACT I

SCENE I

SCENE *The students study* It is a smallish untidy room on the first floor of MRS MCFIE'S lodging house. The walls are papered in a nondescript colour, and there is a door centre back leading to the stairs and landing. When the door is open, the top of the stairs and handrail can be seen. A beam of light comes up from below. Up stage R and L are two doors leading to bedrooms. Down R a fireplace surmounted with a mantel of imitation marble. Placed along this, evenly spaced, are four pewter beer mugs. Some pipes hang from the edge of the mantel, affixed through an improvised pipe rack of leather strapping and brass tacks. In front of the fire, which is lit, is an old fashioned fender, fire irons, and a coal scuttle down R. Centre back, and on either side of the door, are two dressers. The one to the right of the door surmounted by a cupboard with glass doors and containing shelves of books. Medical text books, loose leaf note books, and exercise books—all rather disarranged. The dresser to the L of door is used as a sideboard, on which stand more beer mugs, glasses, an old-fashioned cruet, plates, cups and saucers, etc. In the centre of this is a glazed porcelain pot with aspidistra. One or two etchings, one of the Walter Scott memorial with a vista of Princes Street, Edinburgh, adorn the walls, together with several coloured plates cut from 'The Tatler' (fantasies of Lewis Baumer, etc.) Above the mantel is an engraving of 'Highland Cattle'. The floor is covered with a well worn carpet of a dingy shade of green. Down L is a large round table covered with a crimson plush tablecloth with fringe. A window down L, looking out over the street and entrance door. In front of the window is a small table, on which are microscope, stand lamp, and a few odd note books, paper, pens, ink, etc. A fringed hearth-rug before the fire, and a large arm-chair placed diagonally, and round the table are four

mahogany chairs, covered with plush. The room has the appearance of tidiness, which is belied by the disorder of the book-shelves. A telephone is affixed to the wall just inside the door, and to the left of it. It is an old wall telephone with an automatic conversion. Attached to the telephone is a small book for "calls," and below it a box for pennies.

At the rise of the curtain, the only light in the room is the glow from the fire down R. The door C opens, and MRS MCFIE, a Scots landlady of vague age, of dour and pessimistic expression, enters. She crosses over and pokes the fire. She pauses, puts one or two things to rights, runs her apron along the mantel, and closes the door leading to room R. She crosses back to sideboard L, and takes the pot with aspidistra and places it in the centre of the large table. She stands, in the gloom, undecided, finally replacing it on the dresser. She takes a general look round the room, as if to satisfy herself that everything is in order, when the noise of a taxi cab is heard below the window, a noisy boisterous voice, and someone running up the stairs is heard. MRS MCFIE switches on the lights and opens the door C. She stands waiting.

GILBERT (off) Oh, Mrs McFie! Oh, Mrs McFie! I'm gangin' hame to thee!

[GILBERT RAYMOND hurls himself round the top of the stairs and into the room. He stops short. He is a sleek young man, with a would be sophisticated manner. Terrifically exuberant, with a pleasant open face. He is dressed in a well worn trench waterproof over flannel trousers and sports coat, a rakish brown felt hat, and scarf twisted round his neck in under graduate fashion. He is very untidy, and his coat is wet. He is weighed down with his belongings, which consist of a canvas kit bag, a portable gramophone, and record case, plastered with labels, a ukulele in a case, and he is endeavouring not to drop a paper bag containing three large bottles of beer.]

(Dumping everything on floor) Hullo, me old flower!

[She takes the beer from him, and carefully places it on the table]

How wah ya, Mrs McFie ?

MRS MCFIE I'm no so bad, thanks, Mr Raymond

GILBERT Good (*Dumping his bags, gramophone, etc , on the floor*) Missed me ? I ve dreamt about you every night ! (*Pats her shoulder*)

MRS MCFIE (*impassively*) I'm awfu glad to see ye back again Have ye had nice holidays ?

GILBERT Been to Paris ! ! Oh, boy ! ! (*Then, in broad Scotch*) Hae ye iver been there ?

MRS MCFIE I have not ! And I hae no intention of goin' ! I'm quite content where I am !

GILBERT Of course *you ve* got a happy nature

MRS MCFIE Ay, thank God I have

GILBERT (*roars with laughter*) Ertcha ! How's that husband of yours ?

[He removes his wet coat and hat He wears a top coat under his raincoat]

MRS MCFIE Nae worse than usual He s aye round at meal times, like the rest of ye

GILBERT I ve dumped my trunk inside the door downstairs I want McFie to get it upstairs when he s got a minute

MRS MCFIE Ahha ! He s got plenty of those I ll tell him

GILBERT Thank you

MRS MCFIE Is Mr Williams with ye ?

GILBERT Yeah ! He was on the train (*Taking off multi coloured muffler*) I left him at the station

He s *walking* up ! Said he wanted the exercise (*Snorts*) Too damned mean to share a taxi ! (*He pours out the beer*) How about a quick one before he gets here ? Eh ? You d like to wet your whistle too wouldn't you ?

MRS MCFIE (*melting a little*) Ah weel I
dinna mind

GILBERT 'Course ' ' Come on Did you
ever mind ?

[*She takes down two mugs from sideboard, which he
proceeds to fill*
(*Sings*)

“ My one and only, what am I going to
Do if you turn me down ? ”

[*Pouring out beer*

MRS MCFIE Here s your health, Mr Ray
mond (*Raising her mug*)

GILBERT Happy days '

MRS MCFIE Ay ' (*Impassively*)

[*They both drink He pauses for air*

GILBERT (*wiping his mouth with his handkerchief*)
Allow me (*Wipes her mouth*) Who's here ?

MRS MCFIE Dr Duhamel is back He came
up on the late train last night

GILBERT (*not enthusiastically*) Oh

MRS MCFIE He s up in his room Dressing,
I think He said he was going out

GILBERT (*with a further pull at beer*) Anyone new
coming in here ?

MRS MCFIE Ay A Mr Tritton I'm expecting
him to night He comes from London I thought
he'd be on your train

GILBERT Oh He probably was (*Drinks*)
What is he ? Medical ?

MRS MCFIE I think so I hope he is I prefer
to have ye all medicals

GILBERT Atta girl ' (*He irrepressibly bursts into
song Sings*)

“ Oh ' God bless you and keep you, Mother
McFie ' ”

MRS MCFIE (*ignoring this*) He ll be beginning, I expect I'm putting him in there (*Indicating room L*)

GILBERT Poor swine !

MRS MCFIE It's a verra nice little room !

GILBERT It s a *lovely* little room ! Didn't I sit on my tail in there for three blasted years mugging anatomy ! *Lovely* little room ! (*He pauses, suddenly thoughtful*) How long *have* I been here, Mrs McFie ?

MRS MCFIE Ye ve been with me for near on four years

GILBERT Good Lord ! Have I ? Four bloody years ! !

MRS MCFIE Mr Raymond !

GILBERT Sorry Well I hope you realise that you ll probably have to nourish and succour this one for at least another ten !

MRS MCFIE I shouldna be surprised Why do ye no learn how to *pass* exams ?

GILBERT Exams ! I wish you d *tell* me how

MRS MCFIE Try doing a little work for a change, like Mr Williams

GILBERT He s not so hot !

MRS MCFIE He does wurrk ! It s better than wasting your substance !

GILBERT Oh, yeah ! Well we re going to show em this year see ? I m a mass of new resolutions ! Going to work like stunk

MRS MCFIE I ll believe that, when I see it

GILBERT You ll be proud of me yet, Mrs McFie A day will come when you will be able to tell your friends, " I knew him when (*He strikes an attitude*)

[*The downstairs door is heard to slam*]

MRS MCFIE Ay I expect that'll be Mr Williams (*Going to door*)

GILBERT Finish your beer

MRS MCFIE (*hastening back to table for her mug*)
Och ay

[*They drain their mugs*]

GILBERT Have some more ' (*He sits down at the table in a careless attitude*)

MRS MCFIE Away with ye Do you want me tiddly?

GILBERT Well you needn't say it as if it was the first time

[*MRS MCFIE goes to the door and looks out on to the landing There is the sound of someone coming up the stairs, JOHN WILLIAMS appears at the top of th stairs He is a well built serious youth, pleasant but not over intelligent He is about twenty two A typical undergraduate, and a little fat through drinking too much beer He carries a small suitcase, and a bag of golf clubs Wears a travelling coat, felt hat, and scarf not twisted round his neck*]

JOHN How are you, Mrs McFie?

GILBERT (*singing*) She s fine and dandy

MRS MCFIE I'm no so bad, thank you, Mr Williams (*Takes his golf bag and puts it up R of door*) I m awfu glad to see ye back again

JOHN Thank you Quite glad to be back too (*Taking off wet coat and shaking it*) I don t ever remember arriving here when it *wasn t* raining

GILBERT Damn' wet, isn't it? You ve been pretty quick

JOHN (*hanging coat and hat on door R*) How long you been here?

GILBERT Not long (*Crossing to table*) I stopped in on the way to get these, and have a quick one

JOHN You been drinking that already?

GILBERT (*pouring out a mug of beer*) And why not ? I bought it, didn't I ?

JOHN (*moving quickly to top of table*) Well give me a spot

[MRS McFIE takes down another mug

GILBERT (*to JOHN*) Enjoy your little walk ? Get your exercise ?

[GILBERT fills a mug for him

JOHN (*drinking*) Um Damned cramped on that train all day (*Sighs*) I feel better (*Has a good drink*)

GILBERT (*sarcastically*) Isn't that divine ? (*Continues drinking*)

JOHN Shut up will you ' Where am I, Mrs McFie ? Same room ?

MRS McFIE Ay Ye re up on the next floor Next Dr Duhamel

JOHN Good Is he back ?

MRS McFIE Ay He came up yesterday I dinna ken how long he ll be here He didna say

JOHN I must go up and see him (*He continues with his beer*)

MRS McFIE I ll go and get ye some hot water for ye re room

JOHN Oh, thanks

[*She goes out L taking her mug of beer with her*
The two boys remain drinking

Well another year's work all ahead !

GILBERT Don't dwell on it It's those confounded nine o'clock lectures that get me down in the rain Ugh ! (*Shudders*)

JOHN The noblest profession in the world my boy A life of self sacrifice Ministering to the sick !

GILBERT A sick that never pay their damn' bills ' What do they think we sweat away up here for for five blasted years ?

JOHN You never sweated in your life

GILBERT I'm sweating now Must be this beer (*Wipes his forehead*) Look quite damp '

JOHN You're out of condition, that s what's the matter with you Done you good to have walked up from the station

GILBERT And carried the trunks ?

JOHN And carried the trunks (*Pause Then, quietly*) I wish it *were* five years '

GILBERT That crack, Mr Williams, in the present company, is not quite in the best of taste

JOHN (*laughing*) Well, you've done with anatomy for a bit You ve got *that* behind you

GILBERT (*dolefully*) A surgeon once told me you d *never* finished with anatomy (*Pause*) Think I'll have to be a ship's doctor, and see the world Why didn't you come along to my carriage, and see me on the train ?

JOHN I didn't want to butt in Who was she ?

GILBERT I don't know She got in at Grant-ham Her name was Mary Machonochie Could hardly understand a word she said (*laughs*), but that makes no vital difference She went on to Aberdeen

JOHN She didn't look much like Aberdeen

GILBERT What you been doing all the vac ? Playing golf I suppose and keeping fit

JOHN Played a good deal (*He takes up his golf bag, and withdraws a new club*) What do you think of that ? Isn't she nifty ?

GILBERT (*regarding him with somewhat affectionate amusement*) What do you think of that ? (*Takes a photograph from his breast pocket—French postcard*) Isn't *she* nifty ?

JOHN Good God !

[JOHN *looks at it aghast*

GILBERT French ! (*With extreme satisfaction*)

JOHN So that's where you've been ?

GILBERT Three weeks on " ze boulevards "

JOHN Quite international aren't you ?

GILBERT (*slipping over some more postcards*) It broadens the mind

JOHN How was Versailles ?

GILBERT I didn't go to the suburbs

[JOHN *laughs at him, and replaces his club*

There's a new bloke coming in here Came
up on our train—so our Fifi told me

JOHN Oh Who ?

GILBERT Bloke called Tritton Comes from
London

JOHN Tritton ? Don't know the name do
you ?

[GILBERT *shakes his head*

Where is he then ?

GILBERT How should I know ? I'm not in
charge of the kindergarten Lost his way, I
expect Do you remember the first night *we*
arrived here? God, I was screwed

JOHN You were a damned nuisance !

GILBERT That's an idea ! Let's take this young
bloke out and get him tight

JOHN He might get *you* tight

GILBERT What better way to begin the new
year ?

JOHN No (*Doubtfully*) Don't think so Think I'll
go round and see Terry He's brought up his
new car with him It will be rather good for golf
on Saturdays Be able to go down to North
Berwick

GILBERT That'll be nice for you I had an uncle once who died in North Berwick of——

JOHN What ?

GILBERT Sunday (*He gets up and winds the gramophone*) Get Terry to lend it to me for some night work, will you ? A car's a hell of a help

JOHN (*laughs*) I tell you what I'll come and dine with you somewhere if you like What about the Café Royal ?

GILBERT O K Oh ! I brought this up with me (*the portable gramophone*) Thought it might brighten up the joint a bit

JOHN Play it when I'm out, will you ? As if you didn't make a foul enough racket around here as it is

GILBERT (*busy with gramophone and records*) Oh, rot ! Must have music (*He puts on a record*) Got this in Paris Folies Bergere It's pretty hot ! Ever been to the Folies Bergere ?

JOHN (*moving behind GILBERT and placing books in bookshelf back R*) No Any good ?

GILBERT Boy ! They don't wear a damned thing !

JOHN I thought you'd finished with anatomy for a bit !

GILBERT Isn't this a "hot" one ? (*Dances to C and R, in imitation of Folies Bergère*)

JOHN Not bad (*Still busy with books*)

GILBERT You should have seen 'Les Girls doing this, old boy

[*He turns off the gramophone*

The sound of a car is heard at the door below A taxi door slams The two boys pause JOHN looks out through the window The door bell rings downstairs

JOHN That must be the new bloke

GILBERT Wonder what he's like ?

JOHN We shall soon see Go down and meet him, Gil

GILBERT Go yourself

JOHN McFie will go Now, be decent to him, Gilbert You know what it's like arriving here for the first time

GILBERT I'm not going to fall on his neck Great mistake to rush people Makes 'em bumptious He's probably only a kid He may be a perfect little snurge for all you know, and we shall be loathing the sight of him inside a week Personally I'm not a bit keen on having a stranger in the fold We're a happy enough family as we are

[CHARLES and MRS McFIE are heard off stage]

JOHN We can't help that McFie has to live

GILBERT I still owe her for half last term's washing

JOHN Well pay her, while you've got the money

GILBERT Better keep some up my sleeve You never know when you *may* get stung for maintenance

JOHN (*a little tired*) Ass ! Will you never grow up ?

GILBERT That's the trouble, old boy I have !

JOHN I'm glad you think so !

[*The door opens MRS McFIE shows in CHARLES TRITTON He stands in the doorway—a boy of eighteen, fair, with charm, and perhaps a little old for his years He wears a travelling coat and a felt hat, which he is carrying, and in the other hand he carries a suitcase Under his arm, and balanced with difficulty, is a box of anatomical bones, wrapped in brown paper He smiles tentatively into the room*]

MRS MCFIE This is Mr Tritton Mr Williams Mr Tritton, this is Mr Williams, and Mr Raymond I've put you in here (*She crosses to bedroom R*) Mr Raymond is yonder (*Indicating room L*) I thought you'd sooner be here for this term Ye can always change and go upstairs if ye like

CHARLES (*following her across the room she has opened the door and switched on the light*) Oh (*He looks in*) I see Thanks

MRS MCFIE Ye'll be all right in there (*Takes the box of bones*)

CHARLES I should think so Thanks

JOHN How do you do? (*Shakes hands*)

CHARLES (*putting down suitcase*) How do you do?

GILBERT (*friendly, but a little off hand*) Hullo

[*They all stand for a moment They take him in There is a slight pause*]

MRS MCFIE McFie can bring up your trunk later If there's anything ye're wanting just ring the bell

CHARLES I see Thanks I will (*He is a little hesitant*)

MRS MCFIE Is it medicine ye're doing?

CHARLES Yes

MRS MCFIE (*nodding*) Ahha Well Mr Raymond and Mr Williams will be able to tell ye all about that!

JOHN (*pleasantly*) We'll look after him (*He smiles at CHARLES encouragingly*)

MRS MCFIE Umhm! The bathroom, and all, is on the next floor (*indicating*)

CHARLES (*smiling at her*) Thank you (*She goes out, closing the door*)

GILBERT What do you think she looked at me like that for?

JOHN (*to GILBERT*) You'd better pay your washing-bill (*To CHARLES*) Take your coat off Hang it on the back of the door

CHARLES Oh, right (*Does so*)

GILBERT Have some beer Get yourself a mug off the thingumabob (*indicating the sideboard*)

CHARLES Thanks very much

JOHN Did you come up on our train? I thought I saw you at York

CHARLES The ten o'clock from King's Cross Were you on that?

JOHN Yes You've been a long time getting here

CHARLES I had a little bother at the station I sent a box of stuff on in advance By the time I'd got it out there wasn't a taxi left, and I had to wait I got one in the end The driver seemed to know this address quite well

GILBERT They all know this place They ought to, they often have to bring me home!
(CHARLES *laughs*)

JOHN Been up north before?

CHARLES No

[JOHN *hands him a mug of beer*

GILBERT Here's welcome to Scotland!

CHARLES Cheero!

JOHN }
and } Cheero!
GILBERT }

[*They all drink*

GILBERT (*with a sigh of satisfaction*) Lubly beer!

[CHARLES *laughs The ice is broken*

CHARLES Um—it's jolly good

GILBERT We work in here usually except
round about exam times when we can't

bear the sight of one another We then sit
closeted in our rooms !

CHARLES (*laughs*) I see

JOHN *He* never works anywhere That's his
trouble

CHARLES It s pretty frightful, the first couple
of years, isn't it ? I mean there s an awful lot to
be got through

GILBERT If you *do* get through ! It's taken me
four years to do two !

CHARLES (*innocently*) Has it really ?

GILBERT Dear me, yes Uncle Gilbert could
tell you a thing or two

JOHN Well, don't rely on cram books

GILBERT Cram books are God s gift to people
like me

[At this moment the door opens and PAUL DUHAMEL enters He is in evening clothes He is French, with an attractive sensitive face A post graduate endeavouring to sit an F R C S He is about twenty-nine Pale and dark, he makes a rather pathetic attempt to appear excessively English, but he never succeeds in hiding the foreigner He stands in the doorway, a marked contrast in his well cut clothes, to the other two boys He has a strong French accent]

PAUL Hullo !

JOHN Hullo, Paul ! You got back before me
I was just coming up to see you How are you ?

PAUL Yes I came up yesterday I am no better
and no worse than usual (*Smiles*) How are you,
Gilbert ?

[CHARLES is watching him intently He has rather moved outside the circle to the R]

GILBERT (*always self conscious with PAUL*) Hullo
Like some beer ?

PAUL Beer ? No (*doubtfully*) I am going out
to dine quite shortly

GILBERT Oh, I see

JOHN (*smiling at him*) Still going to work for that fellowship?

PAUL For a little while maybe I don't know (*Laughs, and turns and sees CHARLES*)

JOHN (*suddenly*) Oh, I say I'm sorry This
is er

CHARLES Tritton Charles Tritton

PAUL How do you do? (*He looks at him and smiles*) I am Paul Duhamel

CHARLES How do you do?

[*They shake hands*]

PAUL Just arrived?

CHARLES Yes

PAUL (*nods, taking him in, and pleased with what he sees*) Well, I hope you will like it here Mrs McFie looks after us very well

CHARLES I think I was very lucky to get in here

PAUL How did you know, to come here?

CHARLES It was quite by chance I met a fellow in London who had once stayed here about five years ago, I think so he gave me this address and I wrote and here I am

PAUL That was lucky You can strike some terrible places (*Takes his arm*) Very glad to have you here (*He takes out cigarette-case and offers it to CHARLES*) Cigarette?

CHARLES (*taking cigarette*) Thanks I've never been up here before I felt a bit lost when I arrived

PAUL I know From London?

CHARLES Yes

[*GILBERT and JOHN are a little out of this conversation*]

GILBERT (*suddenly*) Well, if we're going out
(*to JOHN*) we'd better go

JOHN Yes Come on I don't want to be too late

GILBERT *I* may not come back at all, you never know

[*Door opens and MRS McFIE enters*]

MRS McFIE How many of you young gentlemen will be in for ye re supper ?

GILBERT (*rudely*) Not me Not either of us

PAUL And I shall be out, Mrs McFie

MRS McFIE Then (*she looks at CHARLES*)
there will only be you, Mr Tritton ?

CHARLES Yes I shall be here Is that all right ?

MRS McFIE Ay About seven-thirty

CHARLES Oh That'll be fine

GILBERT (*not over enthusiastically to CHARLES*)
I would ask you to come along with us only

CHARLES No please (*Laughs*) I think if you don't mind I'll stay here and unpack, and settle myself in a bit

GILBERT (*relieved*) Righto Come on, John

JOHN Right

[*MRS McFIE, who has been waiting in the doorway, turns, goes out, and closes the door*]

GILBERT (*putting on his waterproof*) Where are you going, Paul ? A lady ?

PAUL Just dining, and going to the theatre with a very nice girl

GILBERT You with a "very nice girl" ?

PAUL (*amiably*) I think you would call Miss Anne Hargreaves a very nice girl, wouldn't you ?

JOHN I should jolly well say you would !

GILBERT (*squashed*) Oh Anne Hargreaves
That s different Well, cheero

[JOHN and GILBERT go out, talking

CHARLES (*on a sudden thought*) Oh I want to
send a telegram

PAUL You can telephone it from here

CHARLES Oh Can you ? It's only to let my
mother know I got here all right

PAUL The telephone is there We put pennies
in the box (*indicates box on wall*) It simplifies
matters at the end of the term

CHARLES Oh I see

PAUL Do you want to send it now ?

CHARLES No There's no hurry So long as she
gets it to night I nearly sent it from the station,
but I wanted to see where I was going to live
first

PAUL I see A little homesick ? (*Smiles*)

CHARLES (*with a laugh*) Give me time !

PAUL You ll have plenty of that

[*Both laugh*

CHARLES (*tentatively*) You're you're not
English, are you ?

PAUL (*essaying a dialect*) Eh, laad, I come from
Lancashire !

[CHARLES is a little embarrassed

No I am a Frenchman But I have lived in
England a long time and here in this
beautiful romantic city

CHARLES Oh

PAUL My childhood was spent in Paris Do
you know it at all ?

CHARLES Oh, Lord, yes I love it I've been there quite a lot with my mother

PAUL (*amused*) With your mother ?

CHARLES (*laughs*) I suppose it does sound a bit funny, going to Paris with one's mother, but she's pretty good at Paris We've been to a lot of places together We quite like it

PAUL That's nice

CHARLES You've been here some time ?

PAUL Nearly nine years off and on

CHARLES Good Lord have you ?

PAUL I qualified here

CHARLES Oh ! (*Nods*)

PAUL I want to get my fellowship, but I doubt if I ever will I find it difficult (*laughs*)
to concentrate on anything for very long

CHARLES Sounds bad (*Laughs*)

PAUL It is It is not so easy They (*smiles*)
know me too well here I am a foreigner
(*a little bitter*)

CHARLES How damn silly !

PAUL When were you last in Paris ?

CHARLES About two months ago

PAUL I like it for a time It's my home I go back sometimes, for various family ceremonies
What part of London do you live in ?

CHARLES Sloane Street Do you know it ?
(*A little eager*) My mother has a business there
Antique furniture

PAUL Not MABEL TRITTON ?

CHARLES (*smiling*) That's us

PAUL (*with pleasure*) But I know your mother

CHARLES (*pleasantly surprised*) Do you ?

PAUL I have met her We have mutual friends
She is very charming

CHARLES Have you really? How extraordinary! At least, I suppose it isn't really. She's fairly well known. She is rather a darling.

PAUL You will find it all a bit different up here.

CHARLES I'm expecting to. I gave them rather a stir at home with these the other day. (*He indicates the box of bones*)

PAUL What is that?

CHARLES Bones. (*Laughs*) Anatomical bones. I have to have them, don't I? I started in early to create a medical atmosphere. Mother tied them up, as she was terrified they'd come open in the train. These come from France. Cost a fiver. A bit hot, wasn't it?

PAUL Coals to Newcastle, my friend. Wait. Look in here. (*He opens cupboard door L, and displays an assortment of old bones*)

CHARLES (*looks into cupboard*) Oh I say! Could I have used those?

PAUL Yes, but it is just as well to have your own. Yours are new and clean. This town is full of students trying to sell their old bones. Ha! it is a source of great revenue in difficult times.

CHARLES (*puts suitcase on table*) I've got a lot of books, too. I'd better show you those. They're probably all wrong. (*Opens suitcase*) I wrote up and got a list—I suppose I should have waited. They're full of the most grisly illustrations. (*Hands PAUL a book*) I need that, don't I?

PAUL Gray's *Anatomy*. That's all right. It is one of those books always bought—and which makes an impressive spectacle on your bookcase.

CHARLES I know. Frightfully impressive. I had it in the bedroom for a week before I left. The maids were very intrigued.

[PAUL has idly glanced at a large photograph in a travelling frame that CHARLES has left lying amongst the books on table]

PAUL That's a charming girl (*Interested, and reads on photograph*) "Jill" Your sister?

CHARLES Haven't got one (*Laughs*) We've sort of grown up together Families always been friends and all that, you know

PAUL (*amused*) I know

CHARLES (*a little embarrassed, and busying himself with suitcase*) It's going to be pretty foul with out her Funny how you realise those things, all of a sudden

PAUL Um

CHARLES She's got no mother, so rather relies on mine She's staying with mother now It's grand knowing she's there

[MRS McFIE enters with a large tray, laid for a meal She places it on the table]

Oh just a moment, Mrs McFie I'll move those for you

MRS McFIE Ye'd better put them in your room

CHARLES Oh Yes I will (*He takes suitcase and books into room L, to return immediately*)

PAUL (*about to go out through door*) Are you fixed up all right in there?

CHARLES Yes Fine, thanks

PAUL (*looking at his watch*) I must go upstairs and get my coat

CHARLES Right

PAUL I'm sorry I cannot stay and talk but you understand

CHARLES Yes, of course I've got an awful lot of sorting out to do here

PAUL Don't forget your telegram

CHARLES I won't and thanks so much

PAUL I will leave you to Mrs McFie

MRS McFIE I'll take care of him (*She is busy at table*) Are ye ready for your supper? It's seven-thirty

CHARLES Yes May as well, I think

MRS McFIE I'll fetch it up the now

CHARLES Thanks

[She goes out, tray in hand]

PAUL There's always beer in the cupboard

CHARLES Oh, thanks

PAUL (*smiles*) Well, cheerio To morrow night perhaps we can go somewhere

CHARLES I'd love to

PAUL (*at door, with a parting smile*) So long

CHARLES Good bye

[PAUL goes out, closing the door]

CHARLES *is left alone He regards the closed door for a minute and then goes to phone and dials 'TEL'*

Hullo? Hullo? Telegrams? Will you take a telegram, please?

[Slight pause]

This is (*peers at dial*) 22479 Name

McFie I want to send a telegram to MRS

TRITTON Yes 96A SLOANE STREET,

LONDON BONES AND I No BONES!

B O N E-S Yes, that's right ARRIVED

SAFELY or LODGINGS EXCELLENT

WISH YOU AND JILL COULD SEE ME AND WISH YOU

WERE HERE REMIND JILL TO WRITE No JILL

J I L-L Then I LOVE YOU Yes, just I

LOVE YOU, and sign it CHARLES Would you

read that through? (*Pause*) Yes Thank you

How much is that? (*Pause*) Right Thank you

(*He writes the amount up in the little book hanging up, and puts money in the box*)

[Enter MRS MCFIE with casserole dish on tray
*She places it on the table He watches her moving
down to top of table*

MRS MCFIE It's only hot pot but it's
awfu guid (*She lifts the lid and stirs the hot pot,
from which steam rises*)

CHARLES (*sitting down at head of table*) Smells
it

MRS MCFIE It's never any use me preparing
a big meal on the first night They nearly always
go out except the new ones like
yersel

CHARLES Yes, I suppose they do

CURTAIN

SCENE II

SCENE *The same About three weeks later*

*The room looks the same, except for the addition of
various student paraphernalia that are absent in
Scene I Golf clubs, tennis rackets, some magazines,
text books, boxes of microscope slides, etc, are about
the room There is a barrel of beer, with tap propped
up L of entrance door The whole room is rather
untidy*

*When the curtain rises, MRS MCFIE is standing
at the table, putting the cups and saucers, etc, in
place She takes up a cup, blows into it, and wipes
it on her apron JOHN WILLIAMS enters*

JOHN Hullo, Mrs McFie

MRS MCFIE Hullo, Mr Williams

JOHN (*hangs up his hat behind door*) Tea ready?
That cake looks good

MRS MCFIE I hope ye'll be liking it Will the
others be in to their teas?

JOHN I should think so Their lecture finished at four

[He picks up the " Scotsman," which is lying on the large armchair He crosses over to the fireplace glancing through the paper and munching a piece of cake He sits down]

How s the leg, Mrs McFie ?

MRS MCFIE *(busy at table)* It s nae so bad to day, but I think perhaps ye better take a peep at it

JOHN *(amused)* Do you think so ?

MRS MCFIE I d feel kind of happier if ye did

JOHN Always willing to oblige a lady

[MRS MCFIE crosses to him, and rolls down her stocking]

(Examining leg) Oh that looks grand

MRS MCFIE I had McFie rub it with the liniment ye gave me Och ! Ye re tickling me !

JOHN Sorry ! Good stuff, that liniment

[He goes on reading the paper He is rather disinterested in MRS MCFIE]

MRS MCFIE *(determined on conversation)* I think that ll be all ye're wanting *(Looks at table)* How s Mr Tritton settling down ? He seems a nice laddie, yon I was just saying to McFie, I ve seen a lot of you young gentlemen come and go I always feel sorry for the new ones *(Sighs)* They ve got to learn it all *(She is rather gloomy)*

JOHN We've all got to learn it all, Mrs McFie

MRS MCFIE *(pouring out cup of tea for John and crossing to him)* Ay ! But there s a del lot you d be far better not knowing I've seen a few crack up under it

JOHN You're not becoming a moralist, are you, Mrs McFie ?

MRS MCFIE Och ! I dinna ken much about morals, and I shut my eyes to a lot in you young

gentlemen But there was that Mr Carew now, and yon girl (*Sighs*) It was all a great pity Ruined all his chances They say he's gone to America I was only saying to McFie last night

JOHN (*anxious to close conversation*) Yes, Mrs McFie Can I have some hot water in my room? That'll be all for the present This cake's jolly good

MRS MCFIE Ay I'm glad ye like it I'll get ye yer hot water the now

JOHN Thanks

[MRS MCFIE goes out As she leaves the room, she collides violently with GILBERT, who is hurling himself into the room He wears a wet raincoat, and dripping, old felt hat

GILBERT (*elaborately*) I beg your pardon, Mrs McFie! I say, you re looking particularly luscious to-day!

MRS MCFIE Oh, get along with you, Mr Raymond! Why don't ye sound your horn when you come round a corner like that!

[She rather flounces out of the room

GILBERT (*removing coat and hat*) Hullo, Johnno! You mammoth of industry

JOHN Hullo Tea's in

GILBERT (*going to table*) Good God! what a sweat They've swung on a *materna medica* exam on Friday, and I haven't looked at the damned stuff yet

JOHN Well, whose fault's that? Did you go to "Old Bill's" bugs lecture this afternoon?

GILBERT Hell! No Don't be silly Terry said he'd hand my name in (*Munching cake*) I've been to the flicks all the afternoon, with that blonde from the Kosy Korner Damn' awful film, but we had our bob's worth of dark

JOHN It's about time you did some work, Gil

GILBERT Work ! Never heard of it ! (*Goes over to gramophone*) What s this ? A new record ? Oh I saw this show in town It s marvellous

[*He puts the record on the gramophone, and proceeds to black bottom The door opens, and PAUL comes in—also wet*]

PAUL (*irritably*) Oh, that tune ! That s the worst show I ever saw How the public stand for it, year after year, I don't know

[*Takes off his coat, and hangs it on the door*]

GILBERT Don t be silly It s a wonderful show Mexicana did a tango in it You ought to see her, John, old boy ! Most marvellous bod ! Learning anatomy on her would be a pleasure Oh, well got to be content with the blonde from the Kosy Korner She has her points, or rather curves (*indicating them with gestures*)

PAUL (*pouring out tea for himself*) You re quite mistaken about Mexicana, she is a very charming girl

GILBERT (*impressed*) Do you know her ?

PAUL Quite well

GILBERT Lead me to her

PAUL Where is Charles ?

JOHN He ought to be in soon

GILBERT What do you think of mother s little helper, Paul ?

PAUL I find him a very delightful person

GILBERT He s one of these arty young blokes, isn't he ? Reads Aldous Huxley to cure his repressions, and pretends to understand it That s a damn' nice looking girl he's got on his mantelpiece (*Takes off gramophone*)

JOHN Oh, stow it, Gilbert One gets a little tired of all this repressed sex enthusiasm of yours

GILBERT (*indignantly*) Repressed ? Me ! !

JOHN You're all hot air You can't help your irresistible allure, I suppose but for God's sake, stop talking about it ' I think you're bloody awful myself I can't imagine any girl in her right mind allowing *you* to mug her about

GILBERT And that, dearie, is just where your imagination lets you down

[The door opens, and CHARLES comes in It is essential for CHARLES to have changed He has lost some of his eagerness of Scene I He is, perhaps, a little bewildered He carries some books, and looks tired He wears a waterproof and hat]

PAUL Hullo, Charles

CHARLES Hullo

JOHN Hullo, Charles !

CHARLES *(takes off his coat and hat, and hangs them up)* Oh, tea Good !

PAUL I'm afraid it won't be very fresh *(Pours cup for CHARLES)*

CHARLES Oh *(He comes over to the table)* Never mind, I can drink anything so long as it's hot This anatomy is awful stuff, isn't it ? We began dissecting to day *(To JOHN)* Did you feel funny, John, when you first began to cut up a dead body ?

JOHN No, I don't think so They're pickled, you know

CHARLES I know But it's rather beastly at first I suppose you get used to it It's tremendously interesting, and, after all, I suppose we're not much use after we're dead, are we ?

PAUL I know how you feel, Charles I did the same It's rather an odd feeling, one's first visit to a dissecting room There is something strangely unreal about a lot of young men in plus fours cutting up corpses in search of knowledge And those awful medical women How

can they do it ? Why do they allow those monstrous females to enter this profession ?

GILBERT That's just what I want to know ' Our Sadie ' in our year is about forty six She's been doing the course for about twelve years, and, in about fifteen more, she is going to thrust her unwanted presence on the heathen Chinees !

JOHN (*getting up—this type of conversation is a little beyond him*) The rain seems to have stopped (*Goes to window*) Think I'll go down and get in a bit of sculling You should take more exercise, Paul

PAUL I get all the exercise I want, thank you

JOHN When are you coming out with me, Tritton You said you'd done some rowing

CHARLES (*laughs*) Yes, but I loathe it I'll play tennis with you when we get a fine day

JOHN Right I'll keep you up to that Are you coming, Gilbert ?

GILBERT I'm coming, but I'm not rowing, my son I'm dining out with a lady friend of mine

JOHN Oh

[*They both proceed to put on their wet coats*
Come on, then Cheero, you chaps See you later

GILBERT (*as they go through the door*) Cheerie bye as they say in Scootland !

[*He collides with MRS McFIE at door, coming in with tray for the tea things*

MRS McFIE I see nae occasion for ye to make fun of the Scots

[*The two boys pause GILBERT twicks her under the chin laughs, and they go out*

Can I clear away the tea-things ?

PAUL Yes Go ahead, Mrs McFie (*Laughs and lights his pipe*) Oh how's the leg?

MRS MCFIE It's a wee bit better to-day, thank you McFie rubbed it for me with that liniment ye gave me

PAUL It s very good stuff

MRS MCFIE Ay Mr Williams gave me some too, but I think yours was the better

PAUL Most gratifying, Mrs McFie, I'm sure

MRS MCFIE (*confidentially*) Ye see I'm so afraid of the trouble ' going inward

PAUL (*amused*) You *always* want to guard against trouble going inward Mrs McFie

MRS MCFIE Would you like to see my leg?

PAUL I really don t think that will be necessary

MRS MCFIE Ye know, I believe ye laugh at me sometimes, Dr Duhamel

PAUL I d never do that, Mrs McFie

[*She goes to the door with her tray, and as she goes out, says*

MRS MCFIE I wudna be so sure of that !

[*He closes the door for her PAUL and CHARLES laugh*

PAUL (*after a pause*) Well, Charles? Settling down?

CHARLES Oh, yes

[*CHARLES sits in the large armchair by the fire He is playing with a pencil and PAUL is watching him*

PAUL You don t look so happy What s the trouble?

CHARLES (*laughs*) Oh nothing Just missing home a bit Funny but (*he hesitates*) I can talk to you

PAUL (*laughing*) Go on, then Talk

CHARLES Well I suppose our home's rather original It's mother really I should so like you to know her well

PAUL I'll call on her while I'm in Town Then I can tell her all about you

CHARLES Fine She'd adore to see you (*Pause*) You must think me an awful fool I'm not homesick really and this work is going to be terribly interesting once you get into it I thought I wasn't going to like it but I do

PAUL It will be better when you get on a bit I think you're going to do very well you know

CHARLES Do you really think I'll be all right?

PAUL Rather

CHARLES (*thoughtfully*) I don't know I live in the clouds too much Jill is always telling me

PAUL The girl in the photograph?

CHARLES Yes She's awfully down to earth, you know I expect we shall be very good for each other

PAUL So it is like that? (*Amused*)

CHARLES Well yes in a way Mother's always been terribly keen on the idea We've both been rather brought up with that in view Do you think it works?

PAUL Sometimes

CHARLES We first met in the bath at the respective ages of two and four

PAUL Naked and unashamed but knowing that there was a morning coat and a wedding dress in a cupboard somewhere for you

CHARLES Well not quite like that She's awfully gay and modern, out for a good time A sort of Kid Butterfly We fight like hell so Heaven help us But the other day

PAUL What?

CHARLES Oh, nothing ! (*Rather thoughtful*) Of course, you've been in love ? (*He gets up and walks about*)

PAUL In love ? (*Laughs*) I m a Frenchman—I'm always in love or out of it You know your Rupert Brooke, don't you ?

CHARLES What ?

PAUL (*quoting*)

And I will find some girl, perhaps,
And a better one than you,
With eyes as wise, but kindlier,
And lips as soft, but true
And I dare say (*laughs*) she will do "

CHARLES It's rather sad that

PAUL Sad ! (*Shrugs*) There is always someone waiting just round the corner, Charles

CHARLES I don t think I want that When you ve got a girl someone trusting you you don't sort of want the other thing do you ? I mean, like Gilbert here I can't quite see things like Gilbert does I rather wish I could Things are so easy for people like that

PAUL They re like children

CHARLES Yes Nothing ever really worries them It's curious, isn't it, how some people interest you immediately—before you've even spoken to them ? You like them before you begin—before you ve really thought about them

PAUL They call that personality

CHARLES Yes, and yet lots of people who make a tremendous noise to justify their existence simply don t exist for you at all I always think the other—liking people immediately—must be a physical as well as a mental attraction

PAUL Physical ?

CHARLES Yes I rather think all friendships

have some physical basis Oh, often entirely unconscious, of course

PAUL You put everything down to sex, then ?
Chemical attraction

CHARLES Yes, chemical attraction I suppose that's what it is You can't get away from it I mean, if you walk into a room and suddenly see a girl you don't know, but you feel that you know quite well, you *will* know her in a very few minutes—because nothing will stop you from meeting You're drawn together

PAUL Exactly ! Chemistry ! It happens at cocktail parties !

CHARLES Well, that's all physical, isn't it ? There's nothing beastly in that Yet it *is* sex

PAUL Yes

CHARLES I've read a good deal about it

PAUL Freud ?

CHARLES Yes

PAUL Oh, don't

CHARLES What then ? Be like Gilbert ?

PAUL No

CHARLES I hate fluffy talk about sex

PAUL So do I I never talk about it As a topic of conversation it's extremely boring As a study—ah, but then that is a different thing Amusing, but sometimes dangerous, for nice little boys like yourself

CHARLES Oh, shut up Besides, I'm not nice

PAUL (*amused*) Aren't you ?

CHARLES No, I'm a mass of repressions

PAUL (*as before*) Oh dear !

CHARLES No, don't laugh I mean I've always lived at home and all that Oh, everyone should be married at eighteen That'd solve it

PAUL Heaven forbid

CHARLES Yes, but it's different for you You go about—and do what you like

PAUL But you see, my code of living is not quite yours In France we don't think very much about vice and virtue We follow our inclinations It is more fun and more interesting so long as you don't burn your fingers (*Then seriously*) You will find love is the only thing in life, Charles Without love, inspiration dies

CHARLES (*thoughtfully*) I wonder how I'm going to get through five years without love ?

PAUL Don't let it worry you

CHARLES There's Jill, you see What I was going to say just now—about the other day—was that it was the day I left to come here—we sort of came to an understanding—that we belonged—and that we'd wait for each other So you see I couldn't let her down, but she's in London, and what good's that to either of us ? Oh, hell, I can see that life's going to be damned difficult

PAUL But you must always make it interesting, Charles Everything is meant I'm afraid I'm conventional enough to be a fatalist as well Remember, that whatever happens must be regarded as an act of God Otherwise, one's sins might weigh too heavily !

*[He gets up, and comes round behind CHARLES
He puts his hands on his shoulders]*

I must go I did not mean this conversation to become an oration on moral behaviour !

CHARLES (*coming to earth*) I'm glad we had this talk though It's funny but you can't get away from it

PAUL Natural, not funny

CHARLES I suppose so (*Pause*) Where are you going ?

PAUL London for the week end

CHARLES London ! Are you ? Then you *will* go and see my family ?

PAUL With pleasure

CHARLES I ve told mother about you
Give them both my love

PAUL I will

[MRS McFIE *puts her head round the door*

MRS McFIE Your taxi is here, Dr Duhamel

PAUL Oh Thank you I must get along

[*She retires*

Oh, Charles, do something for me

CHARLES Of course

PAUL If a friend of mine calls to return some books, explain for me Say that I phoned and could get no answer that I could not wait and that I had to go to London suddenly

CHARLES (*repeating*) Had to go to London suddenly

PAUL Thank you so much See you Monday

CHARLES Good bye

PAUL Be a good boy !

[MRS McFIE *appears on landing*

MRS McFIE I've put your suitcase in the car

PAUL (*with a wave to CHARLES*) Oh thank you, Mrs McFie *Au revoir* (*He goes*)

MRS McFIE I was just wondering if ye could do with some more coal on that fire

CHARLES We could do with some more, Mrs McFie

MRS McFIE I ll get it for ye (*She pauses anxious to talk*) Are ye all on ye re own ?

CHARLES Yes They've all deserted me, Mrs McFie

MRS McFIE Dr Duhamel s gone off to London

again for the week end ? I expect ye wish
ye could have gone too

CHARLES Rather Can't afford it though !

MRS MCFIE And just as well Keeps ye
out of mischief It doesna do Dr Duhamel any
good These week end trips ! I don t say much
but last time he came back fair wappit
wasna the name for it As I said to McFie

CHARLES Don t you think you'd better get the
coal, Mrs McFie ? The fire's pretty low

MRS MCFIE Ay It is (*Sighs, and rather reluct-*
ant) I ll have to go right down to the cellar for
it, but I'll get it for ye

[CHARLES goes into bedroom L MRS MCFIE
brushes up hearth

CHARLES re enters, with book and JILL's photo

Is there anything else ye're wantin' ?

CHARLES (*pretending to read*) No, thanks

[*She goes out with coal scuttle, closing the door*

CHARLES crosses to mantelpiece, puts JILL's
picture on it—it won t stand up Sits in armchair,
looking at photograph and reading a book There is a
knock on the door He puts photo in book A second
knock is heard

Come in !

[*The door opens, and ANNE HARGREAVES stands
framed in the doorway She is an attractive girl,
rather serious and wide eyed, but of considerable
character She is very attractive in an elusive way
She has a rather lovely smile She wears a raincoat,
and a small felt hat She carries an umbrella and
some books She looks rather surprised at seeing*

CHARLES

ANNE Oh (*she hesitates*) I'm sorry, but
the street door was open so I just came up

This is Dr Duhamel's room
isn't it ?

CHARLES (*rising hastily and a little hesitant and awkward*) Yes We share it with him
Do come in He's only been gone a few minutes
You've you've just missed him

ANNE Oh (*Pause*) I hope I'm not disturbing you? I only wanted to return some books he'd lent me I said I'd leave them

CHARLES Oh, yes He said you might be coming He asked me to tell you, he's terribly sorry, but he's had to go up to London on business

ANNE (*coming into the room*) Oh I see (*They both laugh a little self-consciously*) He often does (*There is a pause She looks at the books and then at him*) Well would you give him these books for me?

CHARLES Yes (*Starting*) Oh, yes, I will

ANNE Well (*She holds out the books to him and he takes them There is a slightly awkward pause*) Well I must be getting along

CHARLES Oh don't go Would you like some tea? I'm afraid there is nothing else to offer you here (*laughs*) except beer

ANNE (*smiling at him*) No I've had tea thanks

CHARLES Sure? (*Pause*) I'm Charles Tritton

ANNE Oh I'm Anne Hargreaves Paul has told me a lot about you

CHARLES I hope he hasn't told you everything (*Both laugh*) You're a great friend of his?

ANNE Yes I am rather He's quite a friend of mine We like the same books and things He's an awfully nice person really

CHARLES Yes He is I'm awfully glad he's here

ANNE Don't you like being here?

CHARLES Well yes, I do but all this

sort of thing is rather new to me and, well
well, I'm just rather grateful for Paul He's
been most awfully decent to me

ANNE I m glad He can be a most understand
ing person

CHARLES Yes That s it He does sort of under
stand

ANNE (*with a twinkle*) And is there some
thing about you very difficult to under
stand ?

CHARLES No (*Laughs*) Of course not I take
myself a bit too seriously, that all (*Laughs*)
You know too introspective

ANNE Oh

CHARLES But all the same, it s rather nice
finding a kindred spirit amongst all these
philistines

ANNE (*laughing*) So *that s* what you think of us !

CHARLES Oh, please I didn t mean you
You re not a medical student, are you ? I
mean, you don't look a bit like one

ANNE (*smiling*) No I m not And thank you
(*Laughs*)

CHARLES (*relieved*) I say do sit down
You don't have to go, do you ?

ANNE Not for a minute (*Crossing to armchair*)

CHARLES Do you live here ?

ANNE (*sitting down*) Well yes temporarily
I do sculpture

CHARLES Oh ! That's interesting Have
you a studio here ?

ANNE Yes Or rather I share it with a friend
of mine She s a painter We were abroad to-
gether, so that s why I came up here Any more
questions ?

CHARLES (*laughing*) It sounds grand We're
rather at least I mean mother and I

are rather interested in all that sort of thing

ANNE (*amused at him*) Are you ?

CHARLES Yes

ANNE I m not much good, but one has to do something, and I like it I adore making things Don t you ?

CHARLES Yes (*Laughs*)

ANNE But it must be marvellous to be doing medicine You ll know something that nobody else knows

CHARLES Yes I suppose you do I never looked at it like that before It s rather a closed book, outside the profession, isn t it ?

ANNE I think it must be the most terrific thrill in the world to feel you d really cured somebody You d feel you d really done something for someone

CHARLES Yes You would Of course, I m only just beginning

ANNE Yes, I know

CHARLES You seem to know quite a lot about me

ANNE Do I ? (*She looks at him, and gives him rather a fleeting smile*) Perhaps I do You see you aren t exactly typical are you ?

CHARLES Must one be 'typical' to be a medical success ? At that rate, I m going to be the most fearful flop !

ANNE I don t think you will be at all It would be very dull if we all came out of the same mould

CHARLES (*laughing*) I say do let me get you some tea Mrs McFie can get it in a minute (*He puts the books on the table*)

ANNE No Really

[MRS MCFIE *enters with the coal She crosses over right and dumps scuttle She eyes ANNE, curious*

and disapproving ANNE turns and smiles at her, but receives a frozen stare Her smile fades, and she looks at CHARLES

MRS MCFIE There's ye re coal

CHARLES Thank you

MRS MCFIE (*hesitating*) Will there be anything else ye re wantin' ?

CHARLES No, thanks, Mrs McFie

[She goes out, reluctant and curious]

ANNE (*rising*) I really must go, or I'll be getting you in your housekeeper's black books !

CHARLES Oh, you needn't worry about *her* !

ANNE No ?

CHARLES No After all, this is my home while I'm here, so surely I can entertain my friends when I want to So please don't go !

ANNE (*sits down again, and smiles a little shyly*) I'm glad I'm included among the friends Won't the others be in soon ?

CHARLES Not till after five They're out rowing or something

ANNE Oh I see

CHARLES (*going to table*) What are these books you've been reading ? (*Picking one up*) Oh, that's a glorious thing (*Takes another*) Don't know that Oh, and Shakespeare's songs ! Do you sing ?

ANNE No But I like to play them over and pretend I do I wish I could, it's maddening Do you ?

CHARLES A bit I know most of these So you've got a piano ?

ANNE Um Rather a nice one

CHARLES I wish we had, here (*He turns the pages of book*)

ANNE Which are you looking at ? (*He shows*

her) Oh, " The Wind and the Rain " That's almost my favourite

CHARLES Is it ? *We* seem to like the same things, too

ANNE (*also a little intense*) Funny— isn't it ?

[*They both laugh self consciously* CHARLES *moves backwards, looking at her* He bumps into a chair and laughs

CHARLES (*spontaneously*) I say I'm awfully glad you came in here Do you come from London ?

ANNE No I'm that awful thing a colonial !

CHARLES Are you ? Where from ?

ANNE Oh a very long way from here New Zealand My father is a doctor there I don't expect you've ever heard of it outside a butter advertisement ! But we're not all in butter, you know ! (*Laughs*)

CHARLES But I've always heard it's a marvellous place My mother's brother lives in New Zealand, or Australia, or somewhere You may know him

ANNE What's his name ?

CHARLES Sinclair John Sinclair He's in shipping, or something

ANNE No (*Doubtfully*) I don't *think* I know him There are quite a lot of people living over there, you know You can't know everybody

CHARLES (*laughing*) No, I suppose not I'd love to see the Pacific It's a marvellous climate, isn't it ?

ANNE Yes (*Laughs*) But don't let's talk about the weather, or I really will have to go !

CHARLES (*impulsively*) Oh, no, don't ! I say ! (*Rather eagerly*) Can I come and see your studio, one day ?

ANNE Of course I'd love you to It's pretty dull though !

CHARLES Not with you in it

ANNE (*laughing*) I'm quite a dull person !

CHARLES (*enthusiastically*) I don't think you are
and I'd love to come My mother sculpts
a bit

ANNE Oh, does she ? She *must* be nice, then

CHARLES Perhaps you'll come and see us when
you're in Town She runs a shop It's rather
attractive really You know, all bay
trees in green tubs, and coloured canvas and
things

ANNE It sounds lovely

CHARLES The poor darling works all day
making moth-eaten mahogany so that the son
and heir can acquire a profession up here !

[*He hastily takes a snapshot from his wallet—two
small adjoining photographs in a small leather folding
frame*

That's her

ANNE (*interested*) Oh, she looks sweet ! And
awfully young !

CHARLES She is She always looks like that
just right You know how some women do ?

ANNE I know And who's this ? (*The other
photograph*)

CHARLES That ? Oh, that's Jill (*casually*)

ANNE Your sister ?

CHARLES Lord, no ! (*Pause*) You're the second
person who has asked me that

ANNE Am I ? She's pretty (*Smiles at him*) I
suppose she's the girl friend ?

CHARLES (*a little embarrassed*) Well yes
(*laughs*) in a way We've sort of grown up
together

ANNE I see

CHARLES (*laughing*) I don't suppose you do

ANNE Do ? Do what ?

CHARLES See

ANNE Oh ! (*Laughs*) Why not ? I think perhaps I do

CHARLES (*taking the photographs*) Oh, well I always think it's purgatory looking at other people's photographs

ANNE But those are very nice Look ! I really must go (*She gets up*) I've got to get some food before the shops close Oh, and a frying pan ! Mine's got a hole in I live in a flat, and my daily goes at six, so I usually cook my own dinner (*drawing on her gloves*)

CHARLES Do you ? That must be fun When can I come and see you ?

ANNE I don't know When would you like to ? Come and fry a sausage one night

CHARLES I'd adore to do that ! I'll make you scrambled eggs I'm terribly good at them

ANNE I'll tell you that when I see them (*She goes to the door, and then hesitantly puts out her hand*) Good bye

CHARLES Good bye (*They shake hands laughingly She moves to go He stops her, reluctant for her to leave*) When can I come ?

ANNE (*smiling at him*) You've got to work, you know You mustn't go out too much

CHARLES Oh, I can take a night off now and then Can I come to-morrow ?

ANNE All right The pass word is ' scrambled eggs !

CHARLES Oh ! (*As she is half through the door*) But, I say I don't know where you live ?

ANNE Oh (*Pauses*) Little Lake Street Seventy six Do you know a shop with a tin rooster outside ?

CHARLES (*laughing*) No, but I'll soon find it

ANNE Well, it's above that It's an old furniture shop, and beautifully dusty, so you'll feel quite at home !

CHARLES I'll be there !

ANNE (*laughing*) Good bye now I must fly

[*She goes CHARLES returns to his chair by the fire, thinking Voices are heard off, downstairs*]

GILBERT (*off*) Hullo, Anne ? What are you doing here ?

ANNE (*off*) Oh, hullo Just left some books for Paul I've got to fly Good bye

GILBERT (*off*) Cheero ! (*Calls*) How's Helen ?

ANNE (*from below*) Oh, she's fine Good bye

[*The downstairs door slams GILBERT comes in, looking a little smug CHARLES picks up a book and tries to appear very casual*]

CHARLES I thought you were out for the night ?

GILBERT Well, I've come back Hell these women ! (*Takes off his wet coat*) Rain's mucked up everything Rain ! ! ! (*Disgustedly*) Do you know her ? (*Indicating ANNE off*)

CHARLES Yes A bit

GILBERT So the exalted are slipping, are they ?

CHARLES I don't know what you mean

GILBERT Oh, no offence, old man Anne's a peach

CHARLES A peach ? (*Vaguely*) Is she ? Yes, I suppose she is

GILBERT She's a bit "arty crafty," but she's not a bad looker What about a beer ?

CHARLES Right

[*GILBERT takes down beer mugs, and fills them JOHN enters—very wet*]

JOHN (*to GILBERT*) Hullo, what are you doing here ? I thought you were engrossed in indoor sports to-night

GILBERT Yes, but we were doing 'em out of doors, and look at the weather ! I thought you were rowing (*handing CHARLES beer*)

JOHN Too damned wet ! (*Taking off wet coat*) Here ! Give me some of that beer Terry brought me home in his new car He's calling it " Body Urge You ought to borrow it

GILBERT Thanks I don't require it I'm going out again later (*hopefully*) if the rain stops I came home suddenly to find our young friend here " gone all Buddy Rogers " College girls all over the room !

CHARLES Oh, pipe down !

JOHN (*after a pause*) College girls ? (*Pulling on his beer*)

GILBERT (*significantly*) Miss Anne Hargreaves The " Lovely "

JOHN Oh, Anne (*Looks at CHARLES curiously*) How long have you known her ?

CHARLES Oh, a little while

JOHN She's a damn' nice girl !

GILBERT She's all right A bit cold Too scraggy for me

JOHN You can't tell a nice girl when you see one (*Laughs scathingly*) Miss Mary Machonochie !

[CHARLES is vaguely annoyed The telephone suddenly rings JOHN goes over and leisurely answers it GILBERT lounges at the table, and puts his feet up on it

(*At 'phone*) Hullo ? Who ? (*His voice changes, and GILBERT takes down his feet*) Oh, yes yes

yes hang on, will you ? He's here Charles ! (*GILBERT, disappointed, replaces his feet on table JOHN beckons CHARLES to the telephone*)

CHARLES (*surprised*) Me ?

JOHN Yes (*He crosses to sofa and lounges on it, beer mug in hand*)

CHARLES (*going to 'phone*) Hullo ? (*His tone changes He speaks rather softly*) Oh ! Hullo No Yes Oh (*Disappointed*) Oh, can't you to morrow ? Well, what about to night, then ? Yes (*Brightens*) That s quite all right for me Yes, I d love to Yes What about your frying pan ? (*GILBERT turns in astonishment*) Let me get one No, please (*Laughs*) Have you got butter ? (*GILBERT turns and exchanges a stare with JOHN*) But we must have lots of butter Mm Marvellous In about twenty minutes Where are you ? A call box ? I see Why didn t you come back ? (*Laughs*) Silly All right, I ll bring it along 'Bye (*He hangs up , unable to conceal his animation*) Sorry, you chaps I ve got to go out

GILBERT Don't apologise

[CHARLES *laughs He is excited He rips his wet raincoat off the door, and collects copy of Shakespeare s songs Then waves to them cheerily and rushes down the stairs saying*

A pound of butter and a frying pan
A pound of butter and a frying pan '

[GILBERT *looks round at JOHN in amazement*

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE I

SCENE *The same Two and a half years later Time about seven p m There are a few changes in the room A new tablecloth a new cover on the big chair New unframed pictures, from Sketch and ' Tatler, stuck on the walls*

CHARLES *is at table L centre, smoking a pipe busy with books, note book, microscope, and slides He looks down a microscope, adjusts the focus, and makes notes in his book, consulting from time to time the coloured plates in a text book He looks older, and more a part of the room*

GILBERT *comes to door R of bedroom, wearing a light silk dressing gown over a sleeveless singlet and dress trousers*

GILBERT (*buttoning braces to trousers*) What are you doing ?

CHARLES (*without looking up*) Pathology Slides I made this morning

GILBERT Oh (*Continues fiddling with braces*) Damn There s a button off these trousers !

[CHARLES ignores him—busy
Got any ?

CHARLES (*looking down microscope*) What ?

GILBERT Bachelor s buttons Those clip things

CHARLES No Use a nail (*Still busy*)

GILBERT (*disdainfully*) A nail ! In my trousers !
(*He comes over behind CHARLES He has in one hand a bottle of brilliantine He pokes the bottle under CHARLES s nose*) Smell that !

CHARLES (*does so but refuses to be put off his work*) Hell ! (*Disgustedly*)

GILBERT *Recherché*, isn t it ? “Crushed Violets ! ” I think I m virile enough to get away with it It did the trick the other night God, I m moulting ! (*Rubbing his scalp*)

[CHARLES looks up at him for a minute, laughs, and continues to consult text-book and write in note-book]

GILBERT looks down microscope, having buttoned both brace loops to same button

Oh ! Liver ? (*With profound conception*)

CHARLES Wrong

GILBERT (*looks again*) Oo Look ! There is a little "wiggly" right in the middle of the "field" Doesn't it look sweet on its little dark "background" Awful to think of the harm that little fellow could do (*Walks about rubbing his scalp*)

CHARLES Yes (*Still busy with book*) You'd better be careful !

GILBERT (*laughing and looking at him*) You know you haven't done so badly in your two years, young Charles Do you realise you've caught *me* up ? You haven't missed a subject yet It took me nearly five to get to "bugs"

CHARLES Oh, go and get dressed

GILBERT All right (*Goes off, airily, to room R*) Don't overtax your brain

[CHARLES continues engrossed in his task He stops and lights his pipe, looking at the work he has done]

(*Off*) Who the hell's taken my dress studs ? Did you have them ?

CHARLES (*without looking up*) No (*Pause*) You can have mine if you like They're in there somewhere

GILBERT (*coming to door R*) Where ?

CHARLES (*reading*) In a dirty shirt, in the wardrobe

[GILBERT goes into room L]

GILBERT (*off*) I've got them

[CHARLES continues at microscope, smoking his

pipe GILBERT comes out of room L, removing studs from soiled shirt—a clean shirt under his arm
Won't you want these?

CHARLES No, I don't think so

[GILBERT crosses with shirts, and sits in the arm-chair by the fire. He is very busy with the studs]

GILBERT Aren't you coming to this dance to night?

CHARLES Don't know for sure

GILBERT (*puzzled*) But I thought your girl was coming up from London?

CHARLES (*looks up, a little tired*) She's coming up with someone else in a car. A fellow she knows. I should think they'd probably want to go together.

GILBERT Oh! (*Continuing with studs*)

CHARLES I think I shall stay here and do some work.

GILBERT I see.

CHARLES Well (*he looks up and smiles at him*) I want to get through this exam, you see.

GILBERT Oh, exams! Oh, to hell with exams on a night like this!

[The telephone rings. CHARLES gets up and answers it. GILBERT measures a white dress tie round his neck. He listens.]

CHARLES (*at 'phone*) Hello? (*His tone changes*) Hello!!! Jill, my dear! Where are you? The "Cally"? Have you only just arrived? Are you going to stay there? Well, I'd have fixed rooms, but you were so indefinite. What?

Where? Roger's aunt? Oh, I see (*His tone is a little less warm*) Oh well, you'll be all right, then. Good. What? What? Yes, I am. Yes, I'm very pleased you're here. What makes you think so? Oh, no, I'm a bit tired, that's all. Well, I can't help that. I've

been working Well, come round here and see me Yes Now No, there's no one here (GILBERT *gives him a look*) Just me Yes, of course, come as you are Oh, never mind the mud Well, see you in a few minutes then Grand Oh, do you know how to get here? Oh, he does, does he? Good bye, Jillins (He hangs up, looking rather thoughtful) Damn!

GILBERT (*smirking irritatingly*) What?

CHARLES That settles it I'm not going

GILBERT (*with great meaning*) Oh! (*Goes off R*)

[CHARLES *again goes to the telephone* He dials a local number His voice is lowered

CHARLES (*at phone*) Hullo? Hullo, darling Anne listen I'm not going No Yes, she's here complete with boy friend in Bentley

No No, I really don't want to go Yes, I know, but I've quite decided, so don't be silly I'm going to stay at home and do some work I wish you'd come round here for half an hour Oh, why not? Please Do, there's a darling Well come as soon as you can, after nine Jill is coming round here in a few minutes They'll probably want me to go, but I'm not going No, of course not, silly Everyone else will be out At nine, then Bye (He hangs up)

[GILBERT *comes out of room L* He has overheard all of above He props a shaving mirror on mantel piece, and brushes his hair with extreme care

GILBERT You're getting a bit involved, aren't you? Poor old boy! You'll have to break it gently to Jill, Charles

CHARLES (*resenting interference*) What the devil do you know about it! (*He sits down at the table*)

GILBERT A good deal more than you think (*Laughs and ties his tie*) I know I'm becoming a

decrepit old rake with doubtful knee jerks,
but I still have my sight !

CHARLES (*thoughtfully*) I suppose you're right
I will have to tell her I tried to last holidays
but I couldn't

GILBERT Why not ? You should be a brave
little boy

[CHARLES *crosses and looks out of the window*
He is upset

CHARLES I don't think she'd be exactly torn
to pieces (*Laughs a little bitterly*) My mother is
the trouble

GILBERT What on earth has she got to do with
it ?

CHARLES (*coming back to table*) She has a great
deal to do with it She's so set on Jill and me
going through life together

GILBERT Damned nonsense ! Parents have no
right to interfere in matters of this kind You're
not a kid What about Anne ? I'm sorry if I
appear inquisitive, but you started it

CHARLES I doubt if I could ever have done a
thing here without Anne, Gilbert I don't think
I would have stayed Perhaps you don't under-
stand that

GILBERT (*scoffing*) Oh, no I don't understand
anything ! I'm just a 'dog's body

CHARLES (*not heeding him, and almost talking to*
himself) Anne's been everything A driving
force But I don't want to hurt Jill

GILBERT You're not engaged to her

CHARLES No, but

GILBERT Well (*Laughs*) You'll have to decide
soon Tell your mother to go to hell ! Look
here ! Which means the most to you ? Your
mother or Anne ? You can't have both, you
know

CHARLES Oh, don't talk rot ! It's absolutely different

GILBERT It is and it isn't (*With great worldliness*) You know the psychology of it, don't you ? Two women both wanting the same man His mother, and his—er—sweetheart

CHARLES (*heatedly*) Oh, for God's sake shut up ! I'm in a hell of a mess I know you mean well, but you don't know the half of it (*He again looks moodily out of the window*)

GILBERT (*quelled*) All right ! All right ! Don't get your shirt off But you know damned well, *that* is the fly in the cherry brandy—whether you like it or not !

[GILBERT goes back to his room L

The door opens, and JOHN comes in in golfing clothes and carrying a bag of clubs He dumps them in the corner and hangs up his wet coat

JOHN Hullo ?

CHARLES (*very off hand*) Hullo

JOHN What the blazes is the matter with you ?

CHARLES (*irritably*) Oh, go to hell !

[*He goes off L, to his room*

JOHN looks after him for a moment, shrugs, and proceeds to draw himself a beer GILBERT goes to door R, buttoning his white waistcoat

JOHN What's wrong with him ?

GILBERT *Cherchez la femme* !

JOHN (*looking at him*) *Cherchez la femme* yourself !

GILBERT Betcha life !

[GILBERT goes back into room R

JOHN (*calling*) What time is this show to night ?

GILBERT (*off*) Nine thirty Coming ?

JOHN Yes

GILBERT (*returning from room R and putting on tail-coat, his toilette is completed*) Well, you'd better not drink a lot of that stuff now

JOHN (*gulps beer*) I must go and get cleaned up
(*Brightly*) Did the fourth in three to-day

GILBERT Anyone see you ?

[CHARLES comes back from room L He picks up
a book and sits quietly at the table C

CHARLES Sorry, John

JOHN (*good naturedly*) That's all right (*Pause*)
Well (*He looks at CHARLES to see if anything
more is forthcoming CHARLES shows no sign*)

I must hustle Going out to dinner (*He takes
the mug of beer*) Better drink this in the bath !

[*He goes out He has no sooner gone than the
downstairs bell is heard to ring CHARLES puts down
his book He looks straight in front of him*

GILBERT (*suddenly*)

"How far this little candle throws its beams !
So shines a 'naughty' deed, in a 'good' world !

[*Pirouetting about the room in tail coat*

CHARLES Are you mad ?

GILBERT (*dramatically*) Spoken by Portia to
Nerissa, on their approach to Belmont ! That s
Shakespeare Not bad for me

CHARLES (*laughing, in spite of himself*) Idiot !

GILBERT I played Portia once At school I
was a riot

[*He goes back into room R*

CHARLES smiles He lights a cigarette

Voices are heard off The door opens, and MRS
McFIE appears

MRS McFIE Some friends to see you, Mr
Tritton

[*She stands aside to allow JILL MANNERING to
enter Behind JILL is ROGER COLE*

MRS McFIE, having shown them in, retires,
closing the door

JILL is a pretty girl of twenty She has an assumed

air of sophistication, which rather obscures the true JILL. She is smart and modern. She wears a travelling suit, and top coat and small felt hat.

ROGER COLE *is a typical young man, with too much money and nothing to do with it. Oxford type. A bored young man. He wears perfect clothes, a travelling coat, spotted scarf, and carries a felt hat.*

JILL *bursts into the room, flushed and animated.*
ROGER *remains more quietly in the background. He is faintly amused.*

JILL Charles ' ' Darling ' ' (*She goes to him quickly*) Isn't this fun? Being here? Give me a kiss (*He does so*) Oh it's lovely to see that old face again (*Pats his face*)

CHARLES Hullo, old thing. How are you?

JILL I'm grand. This is Roger Cole, Charles. He's been *perfectly* sweet, and driven me hundreds of miles.

ROGER (*quite ready to be amiable*) How do you do?

CHARLES (*rather coldly shaking hands*) How do you do? Very kind of you to bring Jill up. Er, would you like (*he looks him over*) a cocktail, or something?

ROGER Grand idea!

JILL That would be lovely. Do you *always* run to cocktails here?

CHARLES (*melting*) You didn't expect us to live in complete temperance and celibacy, did you?

[*He crosses to cupboard back L, and proceeds to bring out bottles, shaker, and glasses. He places them on the table, during the following conversation. JILL has crossed to mantelpiece R, and is examining things and the room in general.*]

ROGER (*rather heartily*) We thought you'd probably be able to raise a little malted milk, or something!

CHARLES (*being difficult*) Malted milk? (*Placing cocktail things on table*)

ROGER Yes You know Body building, and all that

CHARLES Oh Never touch it

ROGER We ve had a good long drive to day

CHARLES Yes, I suppose you have (*He goes over to JILL*) Take your things off Jillins

JILL Thanks I think I will They feel as if they'd stuck to me

[*CHARLES helps her off with coat*

Ough ' (*She shakes it out*) It was an open car and we rather scorched

CHARLES (*returning to drinks*) How far have you come to day ?

ROGER From York We stayed there last night with some friends of mine

CHARLES Oh (*Pause*) This is all we ve got so it will have to do Gin, French, and Coin treau

ROGER Lead me to it (*Goes to table*)

JILL (*poking about the room*) What an amusing old room My poor sweet ' (*To CHARLES*) Is this where you burn the midnight oil, with a towel round your head darling ?

CHARLES (*briefly*) Yes Well, something like that Haven't got as far as the towel yet, though

ROGER Let me mix those

CHARLES If you like Go ahead

JILL He ll do them lots better than you, darling He gets plenty of practice

ROGER By the way, where's the ice ?

CHARLES Ice ? We don't run to ice at Mrs McFie's

ROGER Well, how do you expect a cocktail without ice ?

JILL You can make a cocktail out of anything, Roger Just shake it all up, open your mouth and shut your eyes and see what God will send you "

CHARLES Oh, nursery ! (*CHARLES crosses to JILL and puts his hand on her shoulder*) Remember old Ada with us ?

JILL (*nodding*) Um (*For a second, they regard each other*)

ROGER Well, I'll see what I can do Have you got any rum ?

CHARLES (*abruptly*) No

ROGER Pity I learned a very good one in America But you must have rum

CHARLES Oh ! You've been to America How did you like it ?

ROGER Adored it (*Busy all the time with drinks*) Marvellous air in New York Makes you feel so vital

JILL (*laughing*) What are you like when you're feeling 'vital,' Roger ?

ROGER I'll show you, some time

CHARLES I know All the advertisements, telling you how to do it ' all the time

ROGER (*laughing, there is a degree of tension*) Yes, that's the idea It does rather stimulate you to look out of your bedroom window and read

KEEP KISSABLE first thing in the morning Sort of starts you off for the day
(*They all laugh the tension is broken*)

CHARLES (*going to door R, and calling*) Gilbert, come in here !

GILBERT (*off*) Half a jiff !

[JILL and CHARLES regard each other ROGER pours cocktails

JILL I rather like this old room, Charles I think it's a shriek It's a bit mucky though You're looking fit enough

CHARLES I'm all right How's mother?

JILL I ran in to see her just before I left She said she'd been frightfully busy Masses of orders and things She'd had the flu, but was better She sent you love and kisses

CHARLES Thanks She's all right though, isn't she?

JILL Oh, yes Just the 'flu

CHARLES What's she been doing? I had a letter yesterday, but she didn't mention the flu

JILL I really don't know, darling I haven't seen much of her lately I've been going rather gay!

[GILBERT enters, in all his sartorial magnificence

CHARLES Oh! (*He looks at her for an instant*)

GILBERT (*over-brightly*) Oh a party! And I'm all dressed up too

CHARLES This is Gilbert, Jill The world's worker! Gilbert, this is Jill, my sister by proxy And the gentleman with the St Vitus's dance is Mr Cole

ROGER How do you do? (*Vigorously shaking cocktail*)

GILBERT How do you do?

JILL (*very friendly*) How do you do?

GILBERT How do you do?

JILL You do look nice and clean

GILBERT Thank you I thought I was looking rather 'svelte' myself!

[*They all laugh*

(*To ROGER*) That looks like a fruity spot of gargle!

ROGER It is

GILBERT (*handing round cocktails*) Have a gullet washer

JILL Good luck, Charles

CHARLES Cheero !

ROGER Cheers !

GILBERT Here s to the hairs on your chest !

ROGER Wagga wagga !

[*They all drink*

JILL Marvellous ! Roger, how did you do it ?
I must write this one down

ROGER It needs some orange bitters in it really See you have some next time we come, Tritton

CHARLES My secretary shall be informed

ROGER That s better ! I was feeling a little pastel ! We had a puncture, and I had to walk through a ploughed field to find a fellow to help us out I foundered in a bog, and began to feel generally like a cow !

JILL (*rather shrieking with laughter and sitting down L of table*) You looked rather like one too, darling More, please

[*Holds out her glass GILBERT takes it and hands it to ROGER, who refills it*

At this moment the door C is flung open, and JOHN appears, standing in his dress shirt and trousers He is very disarrayed

JOHN (*before he has realised there are strangers in the room*) Anybody got a clean white tie ? (*He stops, very embarrassed*) Oh, sorry ! (*He closes the door hurriedly*)

[*They all laugh*

CHARLES (*goes to door C and calls upstairs*) Come on in ! You needn t be shy

JOHN (*off*) Back in a minute !

[CHARLES *laughs and returns to circle*

CHARLES No good He won't come

[*They are all laughing*

JILL Who was it ?

GILBERT Clark Gable (*Handing JILL her second cocktail, elaborately*)

JILL He looked sweet !

CHARLES That's John He's one of the best
(*Going over to his place, and rather out of the party*)

[ROGER *refills his glass He is a little bored*

GILBERT Are you just up for this dance ?

JILL We made it an excuse to come We've got to go back to morrow I'm going down south on Friday What time is it Charles ? We mustn't be late at the aged aunt's, Roger

CHARLES It's only just six You've plenty of time

GILBERT What pub are you at ?

JILL We're not, my dear We're staying with a most archaic relative of Roger's, whom I've never seen I'm terrified but it's far more respectable, really

GILBERT Yes, I suppose it is

[*There is again the suggestion of an awkward pause GILBERT goes over and turns on the gramophone*

Heard this ?

JILL (*before it starts*) I don't know What is it ?

GILBERT Josephine Baker I brought her back from Paris

JILL (*laughs*) Oh

CHARLES (*to JILL*) Seen any shows ?

JILL A good few My dear (*she crosses over to him and sits on arm of large chair, at his side*) I had an absolute orgy of it last week Roger is very

good about taking me to shows I went with your mother one night, too You don't see much up here I suppose, poor old thing ?

CHARLES No time really, Jill I'm forgetting what a theatre looks like

JILL Oh, darling, don't do that ! But then you're always playing about in filthy operating theatres, and watching hideous operations Doesn't it turn you up ?

CHARLES Not now I rather like it You seem to forget, Jill, that's why I'm here

JILL I know, darling, but (*laughs very un- understandingly*) I'm quite sure I'd never let you operate on me ! (*Spontaneously*) You've been working too hard !

GILBERT Oh, we don't work all the time, Miss Jill Even *I* have my moments off !

JILL Yes I should think you would ! But Charles here, takes things far too seriously, and then gets ill over it !

CHARLES Have another cocktail, and don't talk so much

JILL I'll talk far more if I do and don't snub me like that, Charles (*Vaguely irritated*)

CHARLES (*briefly*) Sorry

GILBERT Well (*puts down his glass*) I must be getting along I have a heavy date with a young cousin of mine whom I've been entrusted to take to this dance Damn awful ! I expect she'll walk all over my feet

JILL (*smiling*) And that will be very good for you !

GILBERT Oh, come now Am I so impossible ?

JILL No, my dear (*gets up and crosses to him*) you're irresistible ! Come and see me some time, if you're up in Town

GILBERT I'd love to

JILL Ring me up We re in the book Charles will tell you Oh ! but won't we see you to night ? Roger can help you out with the cousin, can't you, Roger ?

ROGER That depends entirely on the cousin !

GILBERT That'll be super ! We can join up

JILL Yes Let's Lots of fun ! What time shall we call for you, Charles ?

[Pause

CHARLES I don't think I m coming

JILL Charles ! Why on earth *not* ?

CHARLES (*rather lamely*) Well for one thing I've no one to go with You ll all be even numbers So I think it would be much better if I stayed here, and did some work

JILL (*surprised and annoyed*) Oh but that s absurd You re coming with me (*She goes over to him*)

CHARLES You re going with Cole

JILL Don t be so silly It doesn t matter We ll all be together Here I come all the way from London to see you and go to the dance and you won t go !

CHARLES (*quietly*) Was it to see me, or to come up here all the way from London ?

JILL You know it was to see you Don t talk like that, Charles, or you'll infuriate me !

CHARLES Sorry but you go along and enjoy yourselves I ll see you to morrow

JILL I think you're beastly !

ROGER Look here, Jill, can t we get another girl ?

GILBERT (*brightly*) How about getting the aged aunt to lay aside her tatting and leap to the schottische ?

CHARLES No Really, no It's too late now

ROGER Oh ! do come

CHARLES No, really I'd much better work
I've got an exam very close You go along
and have a good time

JILL (*seeing it is no use, and looking dangerous*)
Well if you persist in being obstinate, there
is no use talking about it (*She takes up her coat,*
and GILBERT assists her into it) Come along,
Roger Let s go and paint this town pink ! (*To*
GILBERT) Can we take you anywhere ?

GILBERT Thanks awfully I'll just get my furs
[He hurriedly goes off R, to return with hat and
evening coat He crosses to ROGER, and holds coat
out insolently ROGER automatically helps him into
it

ROGER (*to CHARLES*) I say, do come Don't
be the heavy blanket, my son

JILL Oh, leave him alone He s in one of his
moods Good bye, Charles Thanks for the
cocktails

CHARLES Good bye Good bye, Cole Gilbert
will look after you and show you the high
spots

[ROGER and GILBERT go through door C on to
landing

JILL (*softening, she comes down to him, and takes the*
lapels of his coat) Sure, Charles, you won't
change your mind ?

CHARLES (*holding her arms affectionately*) Sure,
Jillins (*Kisses her*)

JILL (*simply*) Good bye, then

CHARLES Good bye

JILL (*calling*) Wait for me !

[She runs hurriedly out and down the stairs, without
looking round CHARLES goes to the door, and stands
looking after her

CURTAIN

SCENE II

SCENE *The same It is ten p m the same evening*

CHARLES *is reading by the fire* MRS McFIE
enters with supper things on a tray She lays for two

MRS McFIE Is that all ye ll be wanting ?

CHARLES Yes, thanks (*Continues reading*) Oh,
Mrs McFie, would you mind taking down those
glasses and shaker and giving them a wash ?

MRS McFIE Ay, I will

CHARLES Miss Hargreaves is late Did you
leave the door on the latch ?

MRS McFIE Ay

[*The door opens, and ANNE comes in She is wearing
a soft long frock, with a fur coat loosely wrapped
round her*

ANNE (*to CHARLES*) Hullo ! Good evening,
Mrs McFie

MRS McFIE Good evening, Miss Hargreaves

[*She goes out, closing the door*

CHARLES (*standing up and putting down his book*)
Hullo, darling, where you been ? You're nearly
an hour late (*He takes her coat*)

ANNE Yes, I know I nearly didn t come

CHARLES Why ?

ANNE Well just because you have got
(*smiles*) half your family here

CHARLES Oh, don't be silly *She s* completely
occupied

ANNE (*laughing suddenly*) All right I don t
think Mrs McFie quite approves of me, even
after all this time

CHARLES I m sure we don't mind if she does
or not I approve of you and that's all that
matters, isn t it ?

ANNE (*smiling at him*) Perhaps

CHARLES What do you mean 'perhaps'?

ANNE Oh, nothing, my dear I'm tired to-night

CHARLES Like a drink or something?

ANNE No, thanks I'd like a cigarette though

CHARLES Sorry (*Gives her one from his case and lights it*)

ANNE Oh, it's your last

CHARLES Never mind

ANNE Did the party go off all right? How *was* Jill?

CHARLES Very well Just the same

ANNE I rather wish I knew her I think I'd like her I don't expect she'd like me

CHARLES She's a darling, Anne, when she stops to think of anyone but herself for more than two minutes

ANNE (*smiling*) Don't *you* ever think of yourself?

CHARLES (*laughs*) Well it's true She brought her gigolo with her They've gone off to this dance

ANNE I feel you should have gone

CHARLES Well perhaps I should have, but I didn't want to

[*He looks very troubled ANNE goes to him*]

ANNE You're worried about something About all this?

CHARLES Oh I'm weary Anne (*He looks tired out*)

[*He sits in chair to L. of table She sits behind him, on the table, her arms around his shoulders*]

ANNE Oh my dear You *are* tired Well (*cheerfully*) there's only another month, and you'll have finished for this term,

anyway Then, only two years more for altogether

CHARLES (*takes her hand*) Dear Anne ! I wish I could regard it all so calmly You've been marvellous to me (*looking up at her*)

ANNE What have you been doing all day ?

CHARLES (*playing with her fingers*) I was assisting Watson in the theatre all the morning We had six major ops on Makes you feel a bit flat, standing so long in the heat (*Pause*) Some times I loathe it all, Anne The very smell of the place revolts me

ANNE Now, now that's nonsense They all think a lot of you Carrick said so and he ought to know

[*They are just talking very quietly*]

CHARLES Oh I suppose I ll get along all right I get so rattled at exam times It s the most ghastly feeling

ANNE (*soothingly*) I know, but you must try and not think about it at all, until the actual day comes along You've been working to night, haven t you ?

CHARLES No Not properly You can't with everyone else out enjoying themselves Would you have liked to have gone to this dance ? I suppose we could go yet if you wanted to

ANNE I'd much sooner stay here with you

CHARLES Darling

[*He kisses her, and they remain quiet for a moment They cross over to the armchair by the fire He sits in the chair, she on the arm He plays with her fingers*]

How's the new model shaping ?

ANNE She s all right but she wasn't quite what I wanted

CHARLES Well, never mind (*Settles lower in the chair*) Let's forget all about work for to-night

[*There is a long embrace*]

You know, Anne, you have the most soothing, and, at the same time, disturbing effect on me

ANNE (*laughing*) Have I? I'm glad it's soothing,
CHARLES I often wonder (*vaguely*) what we'd have done if we hadn't met each other

CHARLES I'd have gone back to London and tried to write or something

ANNE And I'd have gone back to New Zealand and been conventional

CHARLES To the young man out there?

ANNE Perhaps I'll have to tell him some time, I suppose

CHARLES About us," you mean?

ANNE M'm

CHARLES You make me feel beastly, sometimes, Anne—when you talk like that

ANNE I can't help it, my dear I'm still very fond of Timmy I always have been

CHARLES Is he anything like me?

ANNE (*laughs*) Not a bit! You wouldn't understand each other at all You'd probably fight furiously (*Laughs*) At least, he would, and you'd be just rudely disinterested

CHARLES Don't let's talk about it then We're both here for two years more You promised

ANNE What?

CHARLES That you'd stay till I'd finished

ANNE Maybe I want to, but I may have to go home before that

CHARLES Oh, rot!

[*Pause*]

ANNE (*rather far away*) Well I don't know (*She looks at him*) I love you, darling

You know that, but I just want to help you and tide you over until you can stand on your own feet You will, you know

CHARLES I doubt if I ever will without you

ANNE Of course you will There's your mother and Jill both waiting for you to do it (*Thoughtfully*) No, Charles, you must let me manage this thing, my dear

CHARLES But you and I sort of make up a whole

ANNE Only when we're here together

CHARLES Oh, that's rot! (*Simply*) I love you!

ANNE Darling, it isn't rot There's your mother and Jill, and all they expect of you I don't belong to that part of you Every time you come back from your holidays, you aren't quite the same, you know

CHARLES Of course I am

ANNE (*a little wistfully*) Not till you begin to need me again I know that home of yours, Charles, very well you know, although I've never seen it You know, you come back to me sometimes with bits of your home sticking all over you like egg shell to a chicken

CHARLES But darling, it's my home Is that very unnatural?

ANNE Not a bit I like you for it (*Pause and she rises and slowly crosses the room*) I've got an egg shell, too, Charles, you know (*She turns and looks at him*)

CHARLES I never think of that

ANNE I know (*She smiles*) But I have all the same Mother and I don't get on That's one of the reasons why I've been over here so long That and you You'd love father

[*She is a little sad*]

Don't let's look too far ahead Let's be happy
That's all that matters Happiness and independence
For without one, I doubt if you could
ever get the other (*She stands looking out of window L*)

CHARLES If only I *were* independent !

ANNE Some day you will be (*She holds aside the curtains, and peers out*) Listen to the rain
Oh, Charles (*turns*), do you remember the song ?

[CHARLES *laughs, and commences to sing She crosses over to him after switching off the lights, and sits on the floor at his feet His arms are about her shoulders, and they rock slightly in the glow of the fire*

CHARLES (*singing*)

' When that I was and a little tiny boy,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain ,
A foolish thing was but a toy,
For the rain it raineth every day

But when I came to man's estate,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain ,
'Gainst knaves and thieves men shut their
gates,
For the rain it raineth "

[*He breaks off, laughs, and kisses her*

ANNE (*looking up at him, and finishing the song*)
" every day ' "

[*She leans back against him, and they remain still for a moment*

CHARLES (*suddenly*) I had a letter from old Paul to day

Oh Did you ? (*Looks up at him*)

CHARLES He's gone on a pearling expedition to the South Seas His letter was from Tahiti

ANNE } Poor Paul He'll never settle You know,
I really } think underneath he's one of the

most unhappy people I ever knew Only, thank God, he doesn't realise it !

CHARLES (*thoughtfully*) I know what you mean You know he used to fascinate me Sometimes he looked rather like Christ and sometimes rather like the Devil

ANNE (*smiling*) Yes Now you say so, he did, rather

CHARLES Good job he has some money of his own I m quite sure he could never make any (*Pause*) If it hadn t been for Paul, we might never have met each other

ANNE Darling You know I think we should have, just the same

CHARLES Do you ?

ANNE Yes I believe in things being rather meant " in this life

CHARLES (*quietly*) So do I I don't think we're deluding ourselves when we say that

ANNE I m sure we re not

CHARLES Don t you rather envy old Paul out there in the sun Tahiti ! It must be heavenly

ANNE (*slowly*) Sometimes, Charles I long for the sun I was brought up in it I must have it

CHARLES So must I I like to feel it all over me You know, Anne sometimes if you lie quite still in the sun you can almost hear light

ANNE (*very quietly*) I know Sometimes you can

[It is essential for this scene to be played very quietly At this point you could hear a pin drop They remain gazing at the fire Suddenly there is a noise of a car outside They do not notice it

A sound of voices is heard on the stairs They come out of their reverie The voices are louder, and outside the door

JILL (*off*) CHARLES! CHARLES! Come on,
Roger! Where are you? Shut that door

CHARLES Damn! It's Jill! (*Jumps out of chair*)
Didn't you shut the downstairs door?

ANNE No I don't think I did (*She crosses L, agitatedly, and looks out of the window. She switches on the lights*)

JILL (*off stage*) Oh, my God, these awful stairs!
Come on, Roger Charles! Charles!

ROGER (*off stage*) Don't make such a noise,
you'll wake the dead

JILL Don't drop the basket

ROGER No fear of that

JILL Whoops! Nearly fell! Charles! Charles!

[CHARLES gives ANNE her coat, but she does not put it on. ANNE remains standing by the window, her coat over her arm]

CHARLES (*to JILL*) Hold on Coming

[He opens the door JILL bursts in followed by ROGER. He is carrying a hamper of food, and two bottles of champagne. They have both been drinking, and are a little flushed and excited. JILL wears an evening frock and coat. ROGER is in dress clothes, scarf, and coat]

JILL (*effusively*) Hullo, Charles darling (*She flings her arms around his neck*)

[She does not immediately see ANNE. CHARLES is between her and ANNE, and JILL faces R on entering]

We've come to see you, and brought you some grub! I absolutely refuse to allow you to work when I'm here

[She has a little difficulty with her speech and is slightly drunk. CHARLES is very embarrassed. JILL suddenly sees ANNE]

Oh! I'm sorry I I didn't see you

[Her exuberance is quelled Her face rather hardens

CHARLES (*awkwardly*) This is Anne Har greaves Jill She is a very great friend of mine Anne this is Jill Oh and Mr Cole

ANNE How do you do ?

[There are awkward 'How do you do s' They are all rather uncomfortable, with the exception of ROGER, who places the basket on table and commences to unpack it

JILL (*looking at CHARLES and then at ANNE*) Oh ! How do you do ? (*To ANNE, almost rudely*) Do you live here ?

ANNE Yes, temporarily I have a studio here

JILL Oh (*Looks her up and down*) Give me a cigarette, Charles

CHARLES Yes Of course

[He slaps his pockets and finds he has none

ANNE (*hastily*) Here are some (*Handing box from table C*)

JILL Thank you

[CHARLES lights it for her JILL resumes her false chattering though she is hurt ANNE crosses to fireplace R, hesitantly grasping her coat

(*Elaborately*) Thank you

[The following scene is played under a hectic artificial strain

We would never have disturbed you, Charles, but you said you d be here all alone (*glances at ANNE*) and *working* ! So I thought it would be fun to bring supper here, and have a party The dance was *agony* When we left they were doing something *horrific* called an *eightsome* A great fat woman in the middle of a ring doing this (*She starts a Highland fling, checks herself, and sits down*) Oh, it was frantic ! I wanted your

friend Gilbert to come and bring his cousin, but they were enjoying themselves, so we left them to it. She's a pet, and Gilbert has *completely* succumbed.

CHARLES (*with an attempt at heartiness*) So you've had Jill on your hands all the evening, Cole after all.

JILL Oh, Roger didn't mind. (*To ROGER*) Did you, my sweet? He's been *magnificent*!

ROGER (*laughing*) Well I'm going to get this going. The food's a bit minus, but the champagne is all right. Put the gramophone on. (*He commences opening champagne at table*)

JILL Good idea.

CHARLES I'll do it. (*He goes to gramophone*)

JILL (*to ANNE*) Do you paint, or what in your studio?

ANNE No. I sculpt. I'm not very good, but I like it.

JILL I always wanted to do something like that. I'm afraid I'm a perfectly *useless* person.

ANNE (*smiling at her*) I'm sure you're not.

JILL Oh, yes I am. Ask Charles. (*Turns to CHARLES*) He'll tell you. Still I think I enjoy life.

[*She opens her bag and proceeds to plaster her lips with lipstick*]

CHARLES Don't put all that stuff on your mouth, Jill. It looks like Shaftesbury Avenue.

JILL Rubbish and don't tell me what to do. It looks smart. (*Turns to ROGER*) Don't I look smart, Roger?

ROGER You look adorable.

JILL Thank you. I'm glad someone appreciates me. Give me a *foie gras* sandwich, Roger.

[*She snatches a sandwich*]

ROGER There you are.

JILL Lovely, Roger ! (*Munching*)

ROGER (*to ANNE*) Have one ?

ANNE No, thank you

JILL (*looking to ANNE, quietly*) Have you known Charles long ?

ANNE Oh, yes, quite a long time

JILL (*to ANNE, a trifle insolently*) Oh ! I see You *understand* him, I suppose (*Turning to CHARLES, irritated*) I don't think I like that record, Charles Take it off

[*CHARLES stops the gramophone*]

I like your friend Gilbert I think he's *sweet* He's so *pricelessly* conceited but he's very young, isn't he ?

CHARLES I don't think he'd like to hear you say so

JILL My dear, he's a *babe* ! Does he *ever* pass exams ?

CHARLES Not very often He has too good a time You see, Jill you can't do both

[*For a second, a flash of understanding passes between them*]

JILL I know (*Slight pause*) Of course you can't (*Brightening*) Give Anne some champagne You don't mind if I call you Anne, do you ? I've had *such* a lot to drink to night, I'm feeling frightfully first namey

ANNE (*taking champagne*) Of course I don't
Jill

JILL Splendid Now we are all friends Give me another sandwich, Roger Don't you adore *foie gras* ? (*She is a little drunk*) I've always wanted to sit in an enormous bed, and eat it all the morning you'd feel *heavenly*

ROGER I did it once I just felt rather like the goose it was made from

[JILL shrieks with laughter

I did it in Spain

JILL (to ROGER) Spain ' What on earth were you doing in Spain ?

ROGER (too brightly) I went there to write a book on China

JILL (giggling) Roger ' You know you ve never written anything in your life

ROGER I didn t say I wrote a book I said I went there to write a book

JILL Isn't he funny '

[JILL gulps more champagne CHARLES watches her She holds out her glass for more

CHARLES Aren t you drinking rather a lot of that champagne, Jill ?

JILL (sharply) What if I am ?

CHARLES I think you ve had enough, that s all

JILL (getting up) If you re going on like that, and start telling me how much I can eat and drink, I'm going back to that dance (She sways a little) Are you coming, Roger ?

ROGER I m ready when you are Why don t you two come along ? (To ANNE)

ANNE (hastily) No, I don t think so I must go home I really ought to do some work

JILL (quickly) Oh do you work at night too ?

ANNE (pleasantly) Sometimes Yes

JILL Well can we give you a lift ?

ANNE No Thank you very much I must go (She hurriedly looks at CHARLES) Good night, Charles

CHARLES Good night (Very embarrassed)

[ANNE hastily goes out, carrying her coat

JILL Well (*turning to CHARLES*), what are you going to do ?

CHARLES Going to bed to eat *foie gras* !

[*The downstairs door is heard to slam*]

JILL Splendid Come along, Roger

ROGER (*with an effort to keep the peace*) All right Let's get along Put this on, Jill (*Her wrap*) Cheero, Tritton, old son I hope we haven't made too much mess

CHARLES You have made rather a mess Good bye I expect I'll see you in the morning

JILL (*softening*) Charles ? (*Going to him*)

CHARLES What ?

JILL (*a little inarticulately*) Oh I don't know (*She hardens again*) We'll probably be leaving pretty early

CHARLES You've got a good long way to go
Jill

JILL Well, good bye (*She makes as though to kiss him, but suddenly draws back*) We shan't see you again

ROGER We'll give you a ring before we leave in the morning

CHARLES All right Make it early, I'm never here much after nine

JILL (*shrilly*) Well I don't suppose we shall even be *up* by then Good bye, Charles (*ROGER goes out C, and on to landing JILL hesitates, and comes back to CHARLES with a change of mood*) This visit doesn't seem to have been much of a success I don't think I'll come again You're not the same person that you are at home

CHARLES I'm sorry

JILL I'll see you in London, then ?

CHARLES Yes

JILL (*almost in tears*) I suppose you send your love to your mother ?

CHARLES Of course

JILL Well good-bye (Pause, and then shrilly calls) Roger, wait for me

ROGER (off) Come on

[JILL runs out after ROGER, emotionally She does not look round

CHARLES moves over to the fireplace He sits down quietly in the armchair, and gazes at the fire Voices are heard downstairs—GILBERT, JILL, and ROGER greeting each other Then, after a moment, the door opens, and GILBERT enters He is a little drunk, and inclined to be noisy He wears his evening top coat

GILBERT Hullo, old fellow I'm going on to a party, and I must have my ukulele (Looks about for it He sees it on the dresser To ukulele) Oh there you are! (Takes it down) You funny little thing! (Kisses it) It's soaking wet out there Raining like hell!

CHARLES Is it? (Turns on him) Why the devil didn't you stop them coming here? You knew Anne was here

GILBERT I did my best, old man Honest I did but she was set on coming (He sways) What an angel she is Charles (He clutches his ukulele)

CHARLES She didn't look much like one when she left here She was half tight

GILBERT Oh, rot! Can't angels get tight if they want to?

CHARLES I'm sure I don't know

GILBERT (looking rather forlorn) Well my good deed for day seems to have gone all wrong (He sees the remains of the champagne) Oo! Champagne! Do you mind if I have some of this, old fellow?

CHARLES You can take the whole lot to hell with you if you like!

GILBERT (affectedly) Oh! Mr Tritton! How can you talk like that?

CHARLES (*walking about restlessly*) Well I do think you might have stopped them

GILBERT (*his mouth full of sandwiches*) Didn't I tell you I did all I could ?

CHARLES (*relenting*) I m sorry, Gil It was my own fault really I can t forgive myself for letting Anne in for that scene, and putting that expression on her face And Jill, too—I feel responsible for her—for her *being* like that

GILBERT (*cheerfully*) Oh It was just an accident So forget it Jill will get over it Don t take your women so seriously Be like me She ll forget all about it, in the arms of Roger Cole ! I think he s pansy, anyhow

CHARLES (*irritated*) You d better go back to your young cousin hadn t you, or she ll be getting into mischief

GILBERT (*enthusiastically*) Oh, she s the most marvellous kid, Charles It s amazing how they change between fourteen and eighteen I hadn't seen her since she was fourteen until to night (*Suddenly lugubrious*) Heigho ho ! (*He revives again*) You must meet her, Charles She ll be up here for a week

CHARLES (*absently*) I'd like to Bring her up to tea one day

GILBERT *Every day, ol' boy* Well (*with a final gulp of champagne, and a sandwich*) I must go Sorry, old man, that things got messed up

CHARLES (*briefly*) That's all right Sorry I was so objectionable

GILBERT Oh, poops to you ! (*Cheerfully*) Cheero ! (*Then to ukulele*) Oh ! wait a minute, darling (*He buttons his coat over ukulele*) You re going out in the rain !

[*He goes out, unsteadily, but happy*]

CHARLES is alone He stands undecided for a minute He then crosses to telephone and dials a number

CHARLES (*at phone*) Hullo ? (*Then in a very low voice*) Hullo Anne ? Is that you ? You got back all right ? My dear, I'm so terribly sorry I wouldn't have had it happen for the world ! You're alone at the flat, aren't you ? I'm coming over What ? No, because I want to I must All right then Yes, right away

[He puts down the receiver very deliberately, takes his hat and coat, and looks about the room He crosses over L, and switches out the reading lamp He goes to the doorway, stands in it, taking a last look about the room He switches out the light, and quietly goes out, closing the door]

The only light in the room is the flickering of the fire

The downstairs door is heard to slam, and—

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT III

SCENE I

SCENE *The same Two years later It is the afternoon of the final examination results Time 4 30*

The scene is played under extreme tension

There are again a few more changes in the room New curtains, cushions, and a modern lamp shade CHARLES S cabin trunk is in the centre of the room, and suitcases strapped and fastened, are on the sofa, back L

GILBERT *is lounging in the large armchair, with his feet on the fender seat He has his ukulele, and, on the floor beside him, a mug and a bottle of beer He is happily drunk He makes fitful attempts on his ukulele, singing at the same time He has great difficulty in striking the right note, making several attempts in different keys He pauses at times, to swing from the beer mug*

GILBERT (*trying his key*)

“Don’t send don t send don t ”

(*Then, suddenly, satisfied with his key, loudly singing*)

“Don t send my boy to prison !

PRISON ! ! !

It’s the first crime wot ’e done ! ! !

‘Six months,’ then said his worship !

Gawd help my erring son ! ”

(*He gets very out of tune, and begins again*)

[*The door opens, and CHARLES comes in He looks strained, pale, and tired He is very nervy and near breaking point He wears a dark blue lounge suit, and subdued tie*

(*Cheerfully*) Hullo Charles ! ! (*Waving mug*) Have a beer Must keep your strength up I think

that's the most important thing
of all (*He gets up unsteadily*)

CHARLES (*jerkily*) Thanks I'll get it Don't you
bother

GILBERT Huh ! (*Falls into chair*) I wasn't
going to

[*Twang, twang, twang, on ukulele, and he com-
mences to sing again*

"Pale hands I love, beside the
Shalimar ah !"

CHARLES John not back yet ?

GILBERT Nope (*Pauses in his noise*) You know
I don't know what you're hopping about
like an old cat on the tiles for If anyone gets
through out of this *ménage*, it will be you

CHARLES (*standing at table disconsolately*) Oh, I
don't know That first paper cooked my goose
I made rather a hash of it (*He fidgets about*)
Lost my head—and upset the ink over it in the
middle That's enough to be plucked on
Obviously no confidence !

GILBERT (*cheerfully*) You should have seen *my*
effort ! I nearly wrote them a letter to apologise
for *sitting* the exam ! But I'm not worrying !
I know ! (*Turns in his chair*) You know damned
well I haven't an earthly I knew that two
months ago ! That's the only thing that's kept
me going, that ! So now the ducky little exam
is over, I can just sit here and drink to my heart's
content ! !

[*He resumes his drinking, and strums ukulele*

CHARLES (*seriously, and not in the least incensed with
all this exuberance*) But you don't seem to
care, Gil, if you fail or not I can't understand
your outlook there It's not so much the failing
That doesn't matter It's having to go through
another year to do it all again Living here
and spending all this money to try and get a

thing and then not getting it My family
would be so disappointed

GILBERT (*sitting up in chair and looking at him*)
Oh you're all right (*Suddenly*) Why, man,
snap out of it and for heaven's sake stop
the moan Drink that down

[CHARLES smiles in spite of himself They fill up
their mugs, and are drinking when JOHN enters He
stands in the doorway, looking rather dismal

CHARLES (*irritably*) Any news?

JOHN No The last viva was at three We should
know by four thirty (*He shuts the door*)

CHARLES Oh—hell (*He turns and looks out
of the window*)

JOHN I asked Terry to send the results down
here in an envelope as soon as they're
through Give me some of that beer It's a
wretched business waiting up there in the rain
with all that crowd, so I thought I'd come
home I never can face the blokes that come
down

CHARLES This waiting is about the worst thing
I've ever had to do

JOHN If you'd come down as often as Gil and
I have, you'd be used to it (*Fills himself a mug
of beer*)

GILBERT I'm absolutely immune! I refuse to
be upset by a vulgar examination

[*He resumes his song and noise, but the other two
give him such murderous looks that he quietly tails
off, sitting quietly At this point, to add to their
irritation, the mournful cry of the coal seller of
northern towns is heard in the street below It goes
on in a dreary monotone*

COAL SELLER (*off*) Cooooooooool! ! Coooo
oooooooo! ! Cooooooooool!

[*It continues for some time The young men remain*

silent and tense JOHN *pours himself out more beer*
CHARLES *is smoking endless cigarettes* Finally he
can stand it no longer He *throws up the window,*
and yells into the street

CHARLES For God's sake stop making that
bloody noise ! Get to hell out of here, can't you
We don't want your blasted coal ! !

JOHN (*putting his hand on CHARLES'S shoulder*)
Steady, old man Calm down More beer ?

CHARLES Please

[*They charge their mugs again, and all drink as
though their lives depended on it* CHARLES *sits
down on his trunk in the centre of the room*

GILBERT (*suddenly*) I feel better now (*With
bright surprise*) I think I'm a bit tight ! !

JOHN (*scathingly*) No !

GILBERT We'll be out of this damned show
this time to-morrow Then London town for
me, ol' boy Good ol' London ! It'll be *marvellous*
to see a decent show again

JOHN I'm going to France on Monday I've
always loathed Mondays, but I think I'm going
to like this one !

GILBERT France ? You ? That's funny !

CHARLES You're staying the night with us on
Sunday though Old Ada is probably making
up your bed now

JOHN (*becoming a little drunk*) Goo ol' Ada ! !

GILBERT I agree Goo ol' Ada ! !

[*The door opens, and ANNE comes in swiftly*

ANNE Can I come in ?

CHARLES Anne, darling ! (*He goes to her and
takes her hand*)

ANNE I'm sorry if I'm an intruder, but I simply
had to be in at the kill Do you know yet ?

CHARLES Not yet Any minute now Do sit down Look here have some beer You've got to do something if you're coming in here

ANNE I don't really want it

CHARLES I'll fix you a cocktail There isn't much stuff left, but we may as well finish it up

ANNE All right That'll be lovely

GILBERT (*has returned to chair R*) Put some Eno's in it Makes them fizz like anything

[CHARLES occupies himself mixing a drink Suddenly there is a loud knock at the downstairs door GILBERT jumps up They all stand tense—listening JOHN goes to the window He looks down into the street ANNE sits at the table]

JOHN (*tensely*) There it is now

CHARLES Probably the gas man! (*Sits down on trunk, apprehensively*)

JOHN (*with a ghastly effort at humour*) Or the police for Gilbert!

[*There is a tense pause, and then MRS MCFIE comes in, rather deliberately She hesitates just inside the door She is as lugubrious as ever She is used to this She crosses to JOHN*]

MRS MCFIE A note for Mr Williams

JOHN (*takes envelope and tears it open, they all stand waiting for the contents, he reads*) "Passed in two subjects RAYMOND Qualified WILLIAMS and TRITTON"

CHARLES (*sitting down heavily on trunk*) Oh, Lord!

[*He sits in a state of collapsed relief He looks completely blank for a moment ANNE goes behind him, smiling rather wanly He grasps her arm They do not speak*]

JOHN Whew! Well (*He looks from one to the other*) That's that!

[*They are all suddenly sober*
(To CHARLES) Congrats, old man Congrats,
Gil

[JOHN *thumps* CHARLES *on the shoulders*
CHARLES *sits, still bewildered, but smiles his*
thanks GILBERT *makes no sound at all* He is
sitting in the chair

CHARLES Thanks John That's fine Good
old Gilbert You're down in one You'll
easily pick that up in September

GILBERT (*suddenly exhausted, but triumphant, and*
leaping out of his chair) Gawd ! To think that
I've only *one* more exam to sit ! It don't seem
natural ! Hell I'm glad about you chaps
though This is marvellous Tuppence to talk
to me now, Mrs McFie ! Have a beer ! ! (*He*
slaps her on the back)

MRS McFIE I dinna mind if I dew, Mr
Raymond And may I congratulate ye all I
always take a great interest in all you young
gentlemen living in the house (*She shakes hands*
solemnly all round)

[*She accepts the mug of beer from GILBERT*

GILBERT What about taking one down to
McFie ? (*Pouring out*)

MRS McFIE He's doon the stair

GILBERT Good

MRS McFIE He'll be awfu' glad to know you
got through

GILBERT (*holding up mug*) He'll be more glad to
get this !

MRS McFIE Ay Are ye nae havin' some beer,
Miss Hargreaves ?

ANNE (*smiling*) I suppose I should have some

GILBERT Atta girl !

JOHN Come on, Anne !

ANNE All right (*She takes the mug, laughing*)
Here's luck to all of you Charles? (*Hands him mug*)

CHARLES What? (*Rather pre occupied He takes the other mug*) Oh

ALL (*except Mrs McFie*) Well cheerio!
(*They raise their mugs and drink*)

MRS MCFIE (*solemnly and belatedly*) Cheerio

GILBERT Come on, Mrs McFie! Aren't you proud of your family? (*Urging her to the door, an extra mug in his hand*)

MRS MCFIE I am that

GILBERT Come along, me old bit of crackling
[*They go out*]

ANNE Poor old Gilbert Does that mean he has to come back for another exam?

JOHN Oh, he'll get that Only the one subject Well Here we are I suppose you realise you're a blooming quack now, don't you? (*To CHARLES*)

CHARLES Yes I suppose I am

JOHN You're lucky You did it in five Took me nine!

CHARLES What are you doing to night?

JOHN Oh I dunno Must do something I promised Gil I would (*He gets his coat and proceeds to put it on*)

CHARLES It's funny—but for weeks I've been thinking how I'd go out and get absolutely tight to night, and have the biggest blind yet Some how, now the time has come, the relief of having the thing over puts it clean out of your head (*He sighs*) I'd like to sleep for a week

[*GILBERT returns, exuberantly*]

GILBERT How are you, Doctor Williams! You lucky cow! (*Punches JOHN in ribs*) Come on, let's

get out of here Gave old McFie a couple of
bob Where's my coat ? Oh here
we are Coming, Charles ?

CHARLES (*smiling at him*) I don't think so,
thanks

GILBERT Come on ! (*With a ballet gesture*) We re
off on a *binge* ! (*Ripping on his coat*)

CHARLES Don't feel much like it I must
start and pack (*Looks at ANNE*) I m catching
the ten o clock in the morning

GILBERT We *all* are ! (*Sees it is no use*) Oh, well,
see you when we come in if we *can* see you
when we come in ! Bye, Anne See *you*
before we go, won't we ?

ANNE Oh, yes of course And I m so
glad about you both

GILBERT Thanks Here give us a kiss ?

[*He rushes and kisses her effusively ANNE laughs*

JOHN (*shaking hands*) 'Bye Anne Be good

ANNE (*dragging JOHN down and kissing him*)
Good bye

[*They both go out GILBERT is heard singing down
the stairs ANNE and CHARLES look at each other
The downstairs door slams CHARLES sighs*

This is wonderful, Charles I can t tell you, my
dear, how glad I am

CHARLES Bless you Anne Everything seems
to have gone flat I can t quite realise it

[*They remain quite still CHARLES still rather at a
loss He looks about the room*

It will be good to get out of here

[*He looks at ANNE, suddenly realising she is part
of it*

He holds her hand next his face

ANNE (*controlled*) Come along I ll help you
tidy things up ! (*She gets up, collecting things from
table, deliberately busying herself*)

CHARLES Will you ? (*He smiles at her gratefully*)
That s sweet of you Oh, Anne, isn t it immense
to think it is all over

ANNE I know Shouldn t you wire your
mother ?

CHARLES They re ringing just before five We
arranged it

[*ANNE nods with forced cheerfulness*

Paul is there, you know

ANNE Yes You told me (*avoiding looking at him*)

CHARLES He s been there all the week Mother
adores him

ANNE I had a note from him yesterday

CHARLES Oh ! Did you ?

ANNE Yes Oh, nothing in it You ll be
seeing him to morrow

CHARLES Won t that be grand He s coming
up here again about the end of the month

ANNE Oh Now let s get this packing done

[*They both kneel down at the trunk CHARLES lifts
the lid, and commences to haul things out on to the
floor—old coats, books, etc*

(*Laughing*) Oh, my dear ! What a muddle ! !

CHARLES A lot of old muck collected over five
years I think I ought to burn the lot

ANNE (*suddenly*) What s that book ?

[*She picks up a book from the trunk*

CHARLES You remember (*He looks at her*) The
songs

ANNE Oh (*Pause*) Yes I remember

[*She looks at him intently He is occupied with the
trunk and clothes*

I d like to have this book, Charles May I ?

CHARLES Of course, dear

[*He looks at her, arrested by her face ANNE stands*

up She walks over to the table L She turns, watching him the book is in her hand

ANNE (*slowly and vaguely*) I won't see you again after to-night, Charles (*She sits at the table*)

CHARLES (*on one knee, and looking at her, unbelieving*) Oh Anne Why?

ANNE Because it's best

CHARLES (*nonplussed*) But Anne (*He shuts the lid of the trunk*)

ANNE (*interrupting*) Listen, Charles you must see I want to talk to you It isn't going to be easy so let me say it in my own way You've got to see, darling, that this all this has come about because we've been so much together propinquity and no one to stop us

CHARLES But, darling

ANNE No, let me finish We've been so free up here, all by ourselves to do what we liked no restrictions I should have gone home a year ago but I couldn't leave you until you'd finished And now you have

CHARLES (*staggered*) Anne (*Pause*) You've got no regrets, have you? Have you?

ANNE None, my dear Only some rather perfect memories and I don't want to spoil them But it can't go on for ever Things like that don't You've finished now do you see? You've finished, and you must go home and I must, too Our paths lie different ways now You see these years have nothing to do with the main stream of your life That's all ahead and your mother's plans for you (*Suddenly*) I'm going home, Charles, I didn't tell you before, but I've booked my passage I did it weeks ago so I would know I was going You see, darling, I knew you'd get

through and that this would have to end
(*She smiles at him*) I must go home to Timmy

CHARLES Do you *want* to go ?

ANNE It isn't what I want to do It is what is
right Sometimes I feel I've been rather a
rotter to them staying away so long You see
I always feel (*trying to convince herself*)
that Timmy is waiting too

CHARLES (*bitterly*) That's funny Timmy
waiting and the family waiting (*He laughs a
little forcedly*) Both waiting for us

ANNE (*she wipes her eyes*) Don't, Charles (*Then,
with an effort at cheerfulness*) It'll be fun to be home
again and see father I've been homesick
sometimes (*Smiles through tears*)

CHARLES Oh, Anne (*He goes to her*)

ANNE No, darling

[*She gently pushes him aside*]

CHARLES (*trying to be reasonable, dully*) When
when would you go ?

ANNE In about ten days time—from South-
ampton I don't want you to come and see me off
Seeing boats off often gives one a warped sense
of values

CHARLES Anne, this isn't *possible* ! (*He is
bewildered and dejected*)

ANNE Yes, Charles It's better for us just to
stop here like this We'll just think we're going
home for the holidays

CHARLES But I can't leave you alone Just go
away and leave you like this

ANNE I'll be all right We'd much better not
see each other after to night I may write
sometimes (*Pause*) This is swan song, Charles

CHARLES Anne, I—I won't be able to go on

ANNE Yes, you will You must promise Once

you get out of this environment, and you're at home again you'll be back where you were always meant to be. You've got a lot to do, you know. It's all ahead of you—and Jill has waited.

CHARLES I don't think we could ever be happy now.

ANNE I want you to be. She's so full of vitality, Charles. It's what you need. And there's your mother. She'll spur you on far more than I ever could. And I shall expect great things of you, Charles—because you've got it in you. I've always meant that we should end like this when you were finished here. I've known we had to.

CHARLES I've never faced it. (*Looks at her, realising it*) You are amazing, Anne. You're so clear minded.

ANNE (*emotionally*) It sometimes (*she falters*)
it sometimes hurts a great deal to see
things too clearly. (*She turns away*) It
sometimes hurts like hell.

[*She is almost inaudible. She dare not look at him.*]

CHARLES Oh, Anne, I can't realise it. That to-night's got to be good-bye.

[*He takes her in his arms. She clings to him desperately and he to her. The moment is cut short by the telephone ringing. They break away, dazed.* CHARLES hesitates, and goes to the telephone.

It'll be mother.

[ANNE nods. *She sits down on the trunk, watching him, and trying to pull herself together. She listens.*

(*He removes the receiver, his speech is somewhat blurred with emotion*) Hul-lo? Yes. Yes. That's right. Put them through.

(*Aside to ANNE*) It is.

(*Back at phone*) Hul-lo. Hul-lo, darling, is that you? Um. I'm lovely to hear you. Yes, perfectly. What? Yes, darling, it's all right.

I got through I say I got *through* ! !
 Yes Absurd, isn't it ? I can't quite realise it,
 but it s apparently true Why, darling ?
 What's the matter ? You mustn't cry !
 (*Laughs*) Darling, stop it You'll make your
 nose shiny ! Where are you, and who s there ?
 All in your room ? Why ? You re not in bed ?
 Darling, why ? What ? Yes, yes I d love to
 speak to him all right, darling To morrow
 yes about six I'm dying to see you
 (*Pause*)

(*To ANNE*) It s Paul

(*Back at phone*) Hullo, Paul Yes Thanks,
 old man What ? Yes, I m all right Yes,
 of course What is it ? Go on yes yes
 I see (*He is becoming agitated ANNE watches him,*
worried) Something twisted ? Operate ? Do
 you agree ? Oh, Paul please stay with her
 Thank God you re there ! Why didn't she let me
 know ? Yes Yes I see When is it ?
 Nine to night ? Where ? Yes, I know In
 Welbeck Street I'll come straight to the nursing
 home from the train Yes, I'll come down
 to night Let me speak to her

(*To ANNE*) She s ill Something acute
 (*She gets up*)

(*Back at phone*) Darling you mustn't worry
 I ll be with you in the morning No, darling,
 I won't not now I know Of
 course I know you ll be all right, but I wish
 I was there with you Well I'm going to
 hang up now Yes and don't forget
 (*He tries to laugh*) You know I LOVE
 YOU I know you do Good bye
 (*He hangs up He turns to ANNE—miserable*) Oh,
 Anne, they're operating to-night (*He clings to*
her)

ANNE What is it ?

CHARLES Something inside They've got a
 specialist and Paul says it must be done

ANNE She'll be all right, darling, or they would have let you know sooner

CHARLES How could they ? It's all happened suddenly in the last two days They didn't want to worry me And now they're all there but me sitting on her bed If only I could get there sooner !

ANNE There's a train at 5.35 (*Looks at her watch*) It's five o'clock now

CHARLES I've got to get it

ANNE (*her hand on his shoulder*) You'll catch it easily

CHARLES Come on

[*He rushes into the room L, for clothes ANNE commences to straighten things in the trunk*]

(*Off L*) Oh hell

ANNE (*pausing*) What is it ?

CHARLES (*off*) I've got no money I was going to get it at the bank in the morning (*He returns to the room, his arms full of clothes*)

ANNE I've got some

CHARLES Have you ?

ANNE Yes but it's round at the flat I'll go round and get it for you

CHARLES Oh, Anne can you That's marvellous of you I must get there

ANNE Of course (*She snatches up her small hat from the table, and pulls it on*) I'll come back here for you

CHARLES Go to the station I'll get a taxi

ANNE No You can get your taxi but I'll leave you here, I'd sooner I can't bear platforms Good-bye, my dear (*She hastily kisses him*) You must hurry now you haven't much time I'll be back in ten minutes Good-bye, darling

[She hurriedly goes out of the door without looking round]

CHARLES (*calling*) Good bye

[The door slams CHARLES stands quite still for a moment, and then returns to the trunk, bends down on his knees, and commences packing He pauses Looks straight in front of him, almost overcome by a mixture of feelings He glances at his wrist watch, pulls himself together and continues to thrust things into the trunk furiously]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE II

SCENE *The same Four weeks later It is about seven p m The room is slightly changed The room has an unoccupied look, and certain intimate things are missing*

MRS MCFIE *enters, and holds the door open to allow a new student to enter*

MORGAN *enters A boy of eighteen He wears a coat and scarf, and carries a bag of golf clubs, a suitcase, and a box of bones, similar to Charles's in Act I He is fresh and young looking and rather shy*

MRS MCFIE This is the sitting room (*She comes into the room*) The bedroom is through here (*Leads the way to door*)

MORGAN Oh, I see

MRS MCFIE They generally wurrk in here

MORGAN You mean, I have to share this room ?

MRS MCFIE (*a shade indignantly*) They all do Ye canna expect me to give you separate sitting-rooms for what you pay me

MORGAN (*looking about*) Oh No Of course not
Who who will be here besides myself?

MRS MCFIE Well, at present there's only Dr
Duhamel

MORGAN Oh, who s he ?

MRS MCFIE Oh, you'll like him all right He s
an old hand He comes and goes He's trying to
wurrk for his fellowship has been for years

MORGAN Oh

MRS MCFIE Mr Raymond will be back again
next week, and then there will be the three of
ye Is it medicine ye're doing ?

MORGAN (*a little portentously*) Yes

MRS MCFIE Ahha ! (*Nods understandingly*) Ah
weel—ye ve got a lot to learn You've never
been here before, have ye ?

MORGAN No This is my first visit to Scotland

MRS MCFIE (*nodding*) Um Hm Ye ll like it
all right It rains a lot

MORGAN (*laughing*) So I've heard

MRS MCFIE Would you care for some tea ?

MORGAN Thanks It's a bit late, isn't it ?

MRS MCFIE Well—ye've been on the train
all day

MORGAN No, as a matter of fact, I came by
road

MRS MCFIE Oh, I make them tea at all hours
here I'm just having a cup mysel' I'll get it
for you

MORGAN Oh, well thanks awfully Just a
cup

MRS MCFIE Will ye be in to your supper ?

MORGAN If that's all right for you

MRS MCFIE Ay Well, I'll get ye the tea

MORGAN Thanks

[MRS MCFIE goes out

MORGAN *looks about the room He smiles, but looks a little lost He carries his bags into the room L, whistling to himself He returns for his hat and coat, which he also takes into the room L He comes back immediately, pauses, and goes over to the book shelves back R Takes out a volume of Thomson and Miles s " Surgery " He becomes interested He is turning over the pages of the book when the door opens, and PAUL enters He has not changed very much Perhaps a little more worn*

PAUL Oh, hullo ! You've arrived You are Morgan ?

MORGAN Yes

PAUL I had a note from John Williams about you How do you do ? (*Shakes hands*)

MORGAN How do you do ?

PAUL Has Mrs McFie shown you your room ?

MORGAN Yes You work in here, don t you ?

PAUL We try to

MORGAN She's just gone to get me some tea She seemed to think I needed it (*Laughs*) She's rather talkative, isn t she ?

PAUL (*laughs*) She is a good soul, though a trifle gloomy

MORGAN She was a bit

[MRS MCFIE enters with a single cup of tea She puts it on the table

MRS MCFIE Well there s yer tea, Mr Morgan Dinna let it get cold

MORGAN Thank you

MRS MCFIE Are ye staying in, Dr Duhamel ?

PAUL Not for supper

MRS MCFIE Oh ! A telegram came for ye (*She gropes in her apron pocket*) I've had it in my pocket all the afternoon I hope it's nothing urgent

PAUL Oh !

[*She hands it to him He tears it open*

MRS MCFIE (*watching him*) Is it all right ?

PAUL (*smiling*) Yes It's from a friend of yours

MRS MCFIE Oh ! And who is that ?

PAUL Mr Tritton He's coming up here to night

MRS MCFIE Is he that ? Uh ! Uh ! It's awfu' glad I'll be to see him *Doctor Tritton* you must call him now

PAUL Um !

MRS MCFIE What's bringing him back so soon ?

PAUL There's a job at the Infirmary a vacancy there He's probably come up to see about it

MRS MCFIE He's verra lucky They only take the good ones (*She looks at Paul*) Will he be staying here ?

PAUL If you've a room for him

MRS MCFIE I can put him up in Dr Williams's room

PAUL Good ! (*Looking at his watch*) You'd better get it ready

MRS MCFIE The bed's made up Did ye know he was thinking of coming ?

PAUL I knew there was this job I haven't heard from him since I got back here ten days ago

MRS MCFIE (*to MORGAN*) Ye'll like Dr Tritton He's a nice wee laddie It's very sad for him He's just had his mother die He was awfu' fond of her, aye ringing her up and all Ah, weel ! There's aye trouble for someone I was just saying to McFie last night——

PAUL You'd better go and get the room ready, Mrs McFie The train will be in by now

MRS MCFIE Ay, I will I'm awfu' glad he's coming back

PAUL So am I

[Exit MRS MCFIE]

MORGAN (*who all this time has been quietly listening*) I say, wouldn't you sooner I barged off if you're having a friend here? I mean won't you want to talk?

PAUL That is all right If we want to talk (*smiles at him*), we can go up to my room So you have come up here to do medicine, eh?

MORGAN Yes I'm terribly keen to begin As a matter of fact, I came up quite a bit in advance to get properly settled in

PAUL If you want any advice about books and things you'd better come to me

MORGAN Oh, thanks I expect I shall be in a muddle for a bit It's all rather strange

PAUL It always is at first

MORGAN Yes I suppose it is

[CHARLES enters *He wears a dark coat, hat, and gloves, and looks tired and worn He carries a small attaché case*]

PAUL Hullo, Charles

CHARLES Hullo! It's nice to see you

PAUL (*introducing them*) Morgan—Dr Tritton

CHARLES (*pre occupied*) How do you do!

PAUL He's just beginning Did you have a good journey?

CHARLES Yes, thanks The train was on time How are you?

PAUL Fine, thanks You look tired

CHARLES I am a bit

PAUL Like a drink ?

CHARLES Thanks, I'd love one

PAUL Good !

CHARLES Is there a room ? Am I staying here ?

PAUL Yes Mrs McFie is getting it ready

CHARLES Good !

MORGAN (*embarrassed, as he is entirely ignored*)
Oh—well—I—I think I'd better go and start unpacking

[PAUL puts soda in glass and neither of them takes any further notice of MORGAN]

Yes—I will

[*He exits hurriedly into room up L, closing the door*]

CHARLES I never expected to be back here
It's just four weeks

PAUL It's good to see you again (*Crossing to CHARLES, and handing him whisky and soda*)

CHARLES You, too (*Takes drink*) Thanks

[*They both drink*]

PAUL Now, tell me What have you been doing ?

CHARLES I had the most frightful time with lawyers and people The house at home was awful I've shut it up Ada's gone to the country You didn't mind my just wiring and coming like this, did you ? (*He sits down in the armchair*)

PAUL My dear boy ! I thought you went to stay with Jill when I left How is she ?

CHARLES She's all right She's gone abroad for a change She's gone to the South of France with some friends

PAUL The South of France ?

CHARLES (*nods*) You see, when anything happens to her she likes to go very fast with a lot of other people It works the other way with me I just want to go away from everyone

PAUL What about this job at the Infirmary ?

CHARLES (*getting up, and walking about restlessly*) I don't know I suppose I should do it Work the only anodyne (*Laughs a little bitterly*) Paul, I do feel lost I just can't realise it just can't realise she isn't there You knew that room of hers all her things nothing there nothing—nothing there at all now Just that awful empty house (*He is very emotional*) Jill was awfully upset, poor kid, but even she didn't really understand She never has known how I feel everything so idiotically I'm no damned use by myself (*He throws himself in a chair*)

PAUL Very few people are

CHARLES Yes, but now there's nobody

PAUL What about Jill ?

CHARLES That isn't any use We're grand friends, but it's still brother and sister if it's even *that*

PAUL I see

CHARLES Mother never knew I'm glad about that

[*There is a pause PAUL moves his chair closer to CHARLES Then quietly*

PAUL I often talked to your mother about you, Charles (*CHARLES looks at him*) She had her doubts about you and Jill She only wanted you to be happy She realised that you had worked hard and now had a profession to follow, and to do something with She was happy in knowing that she had been able to let you do it The week I stayed with her, I saw that she realised

that by the mere wishing together of two rather incompatible people you only drove them further apart It was a pity she never knew Anne

CHARLES I wanted to tell her I tried, but I couldn't when she was so ill You knew that You know what it was like Almost the last thing mother said to me was that she wanted me to go straight on, and be a success She didn't know that I can't without Anne that Anne was just everything Do you remember once saying to me that love was the only thing in life, and that without it inspiration dies It's true I know that now I had a talk with Jill the other day It was more than a talk It was well almost a row

PAUL Oh !

CHARLES I told her about Anne, everything about Anne

PAUL What did she say ?

CHARLES (*with a whimsical smile*) She said she understood And then she went on to say that of course she'd realised I'd have affairs while I was away, that everyone had affairs That's how she thought of Anne like something Gilbert might have got hold of I tried to explain to her just what it *had* meant to me, and she said if it was as important as all that she couldn't see what I'd come back to *her* for, and oh, well, that was more or less the end

PAUL (*after a tiny pause*) Charles, Anne is still here (*He goes over to CHARLES and puts his hand on his shoulder*)

CHARLES (*jumping up*) What ?

PAUL She telephoned me to London I told her I was afraid your mother couldn't live, and she said she couldn't go away not knowing So she stayed on She's going next week, on the next boat

CHARLES (*excitedly*) Where is she ? At the flat ?

PAUL Yes

CHARLES Oh, God ! (*He hurls himself at the telephone, and starts dialling*) (*At 'phone*) Hullo ! Hullo, hullo ! HULLO HULLO !

[MORGAN *shyly enters from bedroom He has his pipe*

MORGAN Oh, er am I ?

PAUL That's all right, come in

CHARLES (*at telephone*) Hullo !

MORGAN (*to PAUL*) Do you I mean
can I smoke a pipe in here ?

PAUL Of course We all do

CHARLES (*as before*) Operator, I want 27849
(*Impatiently*) I *did* dial, but I can't get any
answer Yes Would you mind ringing them for
me ? It's important (*He holds on*)

MORGAN (*showing PAUL his pipe*) It's a new one
I just bought it I thought it might help me to
swot It's a Dunhill

PAUL A Dunhill ? Very extravagant It is
easy to see it is the beginning of term

CHARLES (*at telephone*) What ? But there must
be an answer I see All right, thank you (*He
hangs up*) She must have gone out (*Anxiously
to PAUL and ignoring MORGAN*)

PAUL Well, supposing we take your bags
upstairs You can try again, later

CHARLES Oh, well, all right Where am I
sleeping ?

PAUL Up in John's room, next door to me

CHARLES Oh, good !

[*He picks up bag, and exits, door C, followed by
PAUL*

MORGAN *crosses to the bookshelf, and examines
books He opens the cupboard doors, and discloses the*

litter of bones He looks ruefully at his own box of bones, and hurriedly closes the doors He goes to the fireplace with a book, from which he takes a small photograph, which he tries first to prop up on the mantelpiece He then sits down in the armchair with the book, the photograph on his knee

MRS MCFIE *enters with tray*

He puts the photograph in the book, and hastily stands up, looking rather guilty

MORGAN Oh ! Is it supper time already ?

MRS MCFIE You can have it when you like, as you re all on your own I thought I'd be laying it (*Goes to table*)

MORGAN Oh, well, I'd better put my car away I ll be ready then, if that s all right with you Is there a garage near here ?

MRS MCFIE Ay There s one just round the corner

MORGAN Thank you

MRS MCFIE You tell them you come from Mrs McFie, and they ll no dare to rob ye

MORGAN Thank you, I will

MRS MCFIE Just ring the bell when you come back, and I'll fetch it up for ye

MORGAN Oh, thanks

MRS MCFIE Yon's the bell (*indicating it*)

[MORGAN *opens the door, and ANNE walks into the room*

MORGAN Oh, I beg your pardon Did you (*bewildered*) did you want someone ?

ANNE I was looking for Dr Duhamel (*She comes further into the room*) Oh, good evening, Mrs McFie

MRS MCFIE Good evening, Miss Hargreaves

MORGAN He's just gone upstairs Shall I tell him for you ?

ANNE No It's all right I expect he'll be down soon

MORGAN I can easily run up

ANNE Please don't bother (*Smiles at him*)
You're new here, aren't you?

MORGAN Yes I'm just beginning

ANNE I see

MORGAN I say, I I was just going out
To put my car away Do you mind?

ANNE Mind?

MORGAN I mean, do you mind me leaving
you here?

ANNE No, of course not I know this room
quite well (*She pulls off her hat*)

MORGAN I don't think Dr (*stumbling on
the name*) I don't think he'll be long He
just went up with a friend

MRS McFIE (*suddenly*) Has Dr Tritton ar-
rived, then?

ANNE (*startled*) What's that? Is *he* here?

MRS McFIE Dr Duhamel had a wire he was
coming

ANNE (*flabbergasted*) Oh!

MORGAN Are you sure you wouldn't like me
to run up?

ANNE No (*With extreme uncertainty*) I don't
think I mean, I don't know that I can stay

MORGAN Oh! (*Baffled*) Well then you
won't mind if I—

ANNE No, no, of course not Don't don't
bother about me You go (*She moves to the
fireplace, collects herself, and turns to MRS McFIE*)

[MORGAN goes out, shutting the door]

You've you've not seen Dr Tritton, Mrs
McFie?

MRS McFIE No (*Placidly*) He must have just

come up The door was on the latch I was down in the cellar

ANNE I see (*Pause*) Mrs McFie, will you do something for me ?

MRS MCFIE I will

ANNE Would you tell Dr Duhamel that I came in to see him, but I couldn't wait

MRS MCFIE I will

[The door opens, and CHARLES comes in He stops on the threshold, and he and ANNE look at each other]

CHARLES Anne ! (*He becomes aware of MRS MCFIE, and he looks at her*) Oh Oh, how are you, Mrs McFie ?

MRS MCFIE I'm nae so bad, Dr Tritton I m awfu' glad to see ye back

CHARLES Oh, thanks

MRS MCFIE I was awfu sorry to hear about your mother

CHARLES Oh yes (*Looking at ANNE*)

MRS MCFIE Dr Duhamel was telling me It'll be a sad blow for ye

CHARLES Yes

MRS MCFIE Will you be in to your supper ?

CHARLES Er—no No, thank you

MRS MCFIE Well (*She looks from one to the other, with a glimmer of a smile*) I ll just be leavin you

[MRS MCFIE goes out, closing the door They stand looking at each other]

CHARLES Anne ! You're still here !

ANNE I'm still here

CHARLES (*he moves nearer to her*) Oh, Anne, I've thought of you as being so far away somewhere on the sea I've dreamed about you

there heard the propellers, taking you further and further away from me And now to walk in here and find you

ANNE (*almost with animosity*) Why have you come back, Charles? Was it the job at the Infirmary, Paul told me about? (*She turns towards the fire, with an effort to hide her feelings*)

CHARLES Partly And partly because there was nowhere else to go For the first time this was home (*Laughs slightly*)

ANNE Oh, poor Charles! (*Faces him, sympathetically*)

CHARLES You know what's happened?

ANNE Yes I'm so sorry

CHARLES It was the day you were to sail I thought you *had* sailed I thought that every thing had come to an end at once

ANNE I couldn't go till I knew

CHARLES Why didn't you tell me you were still here or let Paul tell me?

ANNE No it was for myself I stayed You and I were over I'm going next week

CHARLES Next week?

ANNE Yes

CHARLES Must you? Oh, Anne, must you?

ANNE (*again almost with animosity, to protect herself*) Yes

CHARLES Couldn't you stay a little longer? (*She shakes her head*) Anne (*He approaches her*)

ANNE No (*Holding him off*) We've said good bye, Charles

CHARLES We didn't properly

ANNE (*as above*) Properly enough I hate good byes I was glad we were spared them that evening I didn't mean us ever to meet again

CHARLES No, but we have, and it's like a miracle Oh, Anne, there's so much I've wanted to say to you I've written it to you

ANNE What ?

CHARLES All I've realised of what you meant to me and what a ghastly fool I've been how badly I've treated you

ANNE (*suddenly breaking*) Oh, no

CHARLES Anne ! I've been so selfish (*she collapses into the chair, her face averted, and groping for her handkerchief*) taking all you've given me, for myself and never thinking of you Letting you do everything for me and then letting you go like that Will you forgive me ? Anne, you're crying I've never seen you cry before

ANNE (*emotionally*) Don't go on, Charles

CHARLES I must Anne, I'm sorry

ANNE (*crying*) There's nothing to be sorry for

CHARLES There is (*Moves nearer to the chair, and her*) Oh, Anne, I've wanted you so terribly missed you so terribly and known it was *my* fault that I could have kept you if I'd been half a man, and ever given a thought to you

ANNE (*as before*) No no !

CHARLES Anne, won't you stay a little while, and let me try to make it up to you ?

ANNE I can't

CHARLES (*gently*) There there isn't Jill any more, you know That's over It was over when I told her about you because I knew then that you were everything Even if mother were still here, Anne she wouldn't mind my saying that She knew there had to be someone She hoped it was Jill That's all

ANNE (*turning and looking at him*) Have you hurt Jill ?

CHARLES I don't think so, really (*Going to her side*) Jill's never loved me

[ANNE *averts her head*]

I think you have Anne, could you still again? Couldn't we begin again? Not like it was with you looking after me though God knows I still need it but me looking after you a little? (*She puts out her hand, her eyes still averted He grasps it*) Don't go home, Anne Stay and marry me, won't you?

ANNE Oh, Charles (*He kneels at her side, clinging to her, pleading*)

CHARLES Won't you? Let's have all our life together not just an interlude or must you go back to Timmy?

ANNE (*still crying*) I couldn't marry Timmy now

CHARLES Then Anne!

[*She turns and puts her arms around him He rests his head against her, enormously relieved They kiss, he kneeling, she sitting*]

ANNE I never meant this to happen, Charles

CHARLES No, but it has Oh, Anne (*He relaxes*)

[*Positions as in Act II, page 202, only reversed He on the floor, she in chair*]

I think I'm going to cry now

ANNE (*laughing and crying at the same time*) Charles, darling! (*She draws his head on her knee, stroking his hair*)

CHARLES Oh, this is peace again (*He raises his head*) It's funny to be back here

ANNE (*brightening and glancing at the window L*) It's still raining

CHARLES And we don't mind

ANNE Not a bit

[*Voices off*]

MORGAN (*off*) Oh, thanks I'm ready now So you can bring it up

MRS MCFIE (*off*) I'll bring it right away for ye

CHARLES Oh ! There s that damn boy (*Rises on his knee*)

[*They rise*

Can't we go round to the flat ? (*ANNE nods happily*)

[*Enter MORGAN, puffing his pipe furiously*

MORGAN Oh I m sorry I didn t know anyone was here

CHARLES It s all right We re just going

MORGAN Don't let me drive you away

ANNE It s quite all right (*smiling at MORGAN*)

CHARLES You're just going to have your supper ?

MORGAN Yes

CHARLES I'm sorry if I was short with you just now

MORGAN Oh, that's all right

CHARLES Well, I I hope you're going to like it here (*With a laugh, and a glance at ANNE*) I did We've—er—got to rush off now but I'll see you again ?

MORGAN Yes, rather

CHARLES Well, good-bye

MORGAN Good bye

ANNE Good bye

[*Enter MRS MCFIE, with hot pot on tray, as in Act I, page 108*

CHARLES Oh, what have you got there ?

MRS MCFIE It's Mr Morgan s supper It s only hot-pot, but it's awfu' good (*to MORGAN*)

[*She lifts the lid off the casserole dish Steam rises*

ANNE It smells it

CHARLES I remember that hot pot nearly
five years ago

ANNE (*gaily*) It's the same one !

MRS McFIE (*at table*) It's never any use me
preparing a big meal on the first night

[CHARLES and ANNE *slip out hand in hand*

MORGAN *goes to table*

They nearly always go out except the new
ones, like yourself

MORGAN Yes I I suppose they do

[*She stands by the table as MORGAN helps himself*

CURTAIN

REUNION IN VIENNA

Robert Emmet Sherwood

REUNION IN VIENNA

A Play

In Three Acts

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To
MY WIFE

P R E F A C E

IN *Sartor Resartus* you will find this passage, presumably applicable when Carlyle wrote it, much more applicable to-day, and perhaps laughably old fashioned to-morrow

‘ Wonder,” says he, “ is the basis of Worship the reign of wonder is perennial, indestructible in Man , only at certain stages (as the present) it is, for some short season, a reign in *partibus infidelium* That progress of Science, which is to destroy Wonder, and in its stead substitute Mensuration and Numeration, finds small favour with Teufelsdröckh, much as he otherwise venerates these two latter processes ’

It is probable that the frozen image of Carlyle, staring at the Hovis sign gleaming over Batter sea, may be mildly astonished at the suggestion that any of his utterances should have given to an American writer the impulse to compose a romantic comedy about Vienna But the reign of wonder *is* indestructible, and so—for the present, at least—is the desire to escape from Mensuration and Numeration This play, then, is a demonstration of the escape mechanism in operation, and it must be regretfully reported that no form of mechanism is more popular or in more general use in our obstreperously technological age

Which may be regarded as sufficient indication of the spirit of moral defeatism that now prevails in the great, discouraging mass of our contemporary reading matter It is a spirit, or want of spirit, that can truthfully be said to be new in the world—for the reason that in no previous historic emergency has the common man enjoyed the dubious advantages of consciousness (and self consciousness) However unwilling, he is now able to realise that his generation has the ill-luck to occupy the limbo-like interlude between one age and another Looking about him, he sees a shell-torn No Man’s Land,

filled with barbed wire entanglements and stench and uncertainty If it is not actual chaos, it is a convincing counterfeit thereof Before him is black doubt, punctured by brief flashes of ominous light, whose revelations are not comforting Behind him is nothing but the ghastly wreckage of burned bridges

In his desperation, which he assures himself is essentially comic, he casts about for weapons of defence The old minds offer him Superstition, but it is a stringless bow, impotent in its obsolescence The new minds offer him Rationalism, but it is a boomerang He must devise pitiful defences of his own, like a soldier who spreads a sheet of wrapping paper over his bivouac to keep out the airplane bombs In Europe, this manifests itself in the heroic but anachronistic attempt to recreate the illusions of nationalism, people drugging themselves with the comforting hope that to-morrow will be a repetition of yesterday, that the Cæsars and the Tudors will return

In America, which has had no Cæsars or Tudors, nor even any Hohenzollerns or Habsburgs, the favourite weapon of defence against unlovely reality is a kind of half-hearted cynicism that is increasingly tremulous, increasingly shrill

As an alternative to cynicism is the sentimentalism which derives exquisite anguish from an acknowledgment of futility Consider the "Hollow Men" in T S Eliot's terrible verses "shape without form, shade without colour, paralysed force, gesture without motion" Eliot is among the few authorised spokesmen of his time

*' This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper '*

Here is another spokesman, a tabloid newspaper, the *New York Daily News*, which gives true statement of a present problem

“ Which is better—to live in fear of kidnappers, stick-ups and blackmailers whom the law can't touch, or to trade our remaining liberties of speech and action for the security which a strong ruler (Mussolini or Stalin) can guarantee ? We feel sure we can answer that question for any American mother, at least She would be glad to trade her remaining American liberties for the knowledge that she could put her baby in its crib to-night and find it there safe to-morrow morning ”

Democracy—liberty, equality, fraternity, and the pursuit of happiness ! Peace and prosperity ! Emancipation by enlightenment ! All the distillations of man's maturing intelligence have gone sour

The worst of it is that man had been so full of hope He had complete confidence in the age of reason, the age of the neutralisation of nature, for it was his own idea It differed from all previous ages in this great respect it was not caused by the movements of glaciers, the upheaval or submersion of continents, the imposition of prolonged droughts it was the product of man's restless thought and tireless industry, planned and developed by him not in collaboration with nature but implacable opposition to it The reasonings of such as Roger Bacon, Copernicus, Galileo and Newton started the assault upon ignorance, and it has been carried on by countless thinkers and talkers from Voltaire and Rousseau to Shaw and Wells

This is the career of the age of reason

The eighteenth century knew the excitements of conception, culminating in the supreme orgasm of the French Revolution

The nineteenth century was the period of gestation, marred by occasional symptoms of nausea and hysteria and a few dark forebodings, but generally orderly and complacent

For the twentieth century have remained the

excruciating labour pains and the discovery that the child is a monster, and as modern man looks upon it, and recalls the assurances of the omniscient obstetricians, he is sore distressed. He wishes that with his eyes he could see not, that with his ears he could not hear. But his senses are remarkably acute.

After Darwin, it all seemed so easy. Huxley preached the gospel, Pasteur peered through his microscope and detected the destroyers, Edison and Freud began to see the light. Science conferred its blessings at a bewilderingly extravagant rate. It was then that Victor Hugo expressed man's ascendant optimism.

"Give time for the realisation of the acme of social salvation,—gratuitous and compulsory education. How long will it take? A quarter of a century, and then imagine the incalculable sum of intellectual development. Look! raise your eyes! the supreme epic is accomplished. The legions of light drive backward the hordes of flame.

Twenty-five years! But exactly twice that number of years after Hugo's prophecy the legions of light converged upon Flanders, and the process of dissolution—political, economic and ethical—had begun. Twelve million soldiers died for democracy, and now the *New York Daily News* announces that mothers would rather have their babies safe. But it is doubtful that the mothers or their sons will derive much joy from consideration of the proffered panaceas. Man is a sick animal, and the chief symptom of his malady is embittered distrust of all the physicians who would attempt to heal him.

The discredited vicars of God believe they can be helpful. They say, "Go back to the faith of your fathers!"

They might as well say, "Crawl back into the wombs of your mothers."

The discredited ideologues of the laboratory

believe that they can be helpful. They say, ' Be aware ! Be confident ! Go forward with firm tread through the entanglements (which are purely psychological), inspired by the assurances of our continued research. If you feel that you suffer from a plethora of science, then the only cure for it is more science ' They even go so far as to suggest that the physicists might mark time for a while, to allow the biologists, psychologists and sociologists to catch up. The human organism must be reconstructed so that it will be as fool-proof as the adding machine.

Man is, for the moment, scornful of the formulæ of the scientists, for he believes that it was they who got him into this mess. To hell with them, and their infallible laws, their experiments noble in motive and disastrous in result, their antiseptic Utopia, their vitamins and their lethal gases, their cosmic rays and their neuroses, all tidily encased in cellophane. To hell with them, says man, but with no relish, for he has been deprived even of faith in the potency of damnation.

In *The Modern Temper*, Joseph Wood Krutch has spoken as eloquently for his generation as Hugo did for his. He has written: " We went to science in search of light, not merely upon the nature of matter but upon the nature of man as well, and though that which we have received may be light of a sort, it is not adapted to our eyes and is not anything by which we can see "

Or perhaps it is a light which enables us to see all too clearly the destination of civilisation as directed by science. Perhaps at the end of the long, straight road we see the ultimate ant-hill, the triumph of collectivism, with the law of averages strictly, equably enforced. It may well mean fulfilment of the dreams of all the philosophers: the Perfect State.

It is a prospect of unrelieved dreariness. I

could not imagine writing a paragraph about a reformed world," Joseph Hergesheimer has confessed, and he might have added that before man could even live in such a world, he would have to be deprived of the very power to imagine, a sort of intellectual castration resulting in loss of the one attribute which has made survival worth all the required effort and pain

It is this prospect which provokes the wailing that sounds throughout all the literature of this period, and it should provide great amusement for our descendants—provided they *are* our descendants, rather than laboratory products, and also provided our literature lives that long, which is doubtful. It would seem that the only subjects now available for man's contemplation are his disillusionment with the exposed past and his disinclination to accept the stultifying circumstances of the revealed future. The one substitute for the vanished solace of religion, the frustrated idealism of democracy, and the demolished security of capitalism, is abject submission of body and mind to the dictatorship of pure theory. There can be no possibility of choice in the matter. Science permits no compromise, a formula is either correct or it is incorrect, and only one scientific formula for the organisation of life on earth has as yet been conceived, and it is the skeleton of Marxism. The attempt to mitigate this formula, to soften its impact, to introduce into it loopholes for the admission of some of the more desirable of the old ideas (such as poetry, the luxury of leisure, etc.) is as absurd as the pathetic attempts of the theologians to adapt their dogmas to the exigencies of modernism. When man accepts the principles of collectivism, he accepts a clearly stated, cleanly defined trend in evolution, the theoretic outcome of which is inescapable. He is enlisting in the great army of uniformity, renouncing forever his right to be out of step as

he marches with all the others into that ideal state in which there is no flaw in the gigantic rhythm of technology, no stalk of wheat too few or too many, no destructive passion, no waste, no fear, no provocation to revolt—the ultimate ant hill. Man is afraid of communism not because he thinks it will be a failure but because he suspects it might be too complete a success.

So man is giving loud expression to his reluctance to confront the seemingly inevitable. He is desperately cherishing the only remaining manifestation of the individualism which first distinguished him in the animal kingdom. It is the anarchistic impulse, rigorously inhibited but still alive—the impulse to be drunk and disorderly, to smash laws and icons, to draw a moustache and beard on the Mona Lisa, to be a hurler of bombs and monkey wrenches—the impulse to be an artist and a damned fool. It was this impulse which animated Galileo in the face of Romanism and Lenin in the face of Tsarism, but the disciples of both of them are determined to exterminate it and can undoubtedly do so, with the aid of the disciples of Freud. There is no reason why the successful neutralisation of nature cannot be extended to include human nature.

Man has been clinging to the hope that has been his since he was delivered from feudalism—hope that he may live a life which is, in the words of Whitman, “copious, vehement, spiritual, bold.” He is seeing that hope destroyed by instruments of his own devising, and the reverberations of his protest are shaking his earth.

Perhaps this protest is only the last gasp of primitivism. Perhaps man feels that the traditions of his race demand of him a show of spirit before he submerges himself in the mass and that, when the little show is over, he will be glad enough to fall meekly into line.

And then again—perhaps he knows that he is doomed, anyway, that he is riding to oblivion in a vehicle of antiquated design. For there is still space, and the infinite mysteries thereof. The most advanced of all the scientists are now considering it, gravely, and they are not optimistic as to the results of their ruminations. One of them, Sir James Jeans, has said

“Science knows of no change except the change of growing older, and of no progress except progress to the grave. So far as our present knowledge goes, we are compelled to believe that the whole material universe is an example, on the grand scale, of this. It appears to be passing away like a tale that is told, dissolving into nothingness like a vision. The human race, whose intelligence dates back only a single tick of the astronomical clock, could hardly hope to understand so soon what it all means.”

So there is hope, after all. Man may not have time to complete the process of his own undoing before the unknown forces have combined to burst the bubble of his universe.

Or it may be that there are changes impending of which Science knows nothing. In any event, those who may read this play, or see it performed, may rest assured that it does not provide nor even attempt solution of the mess of problems touched upon in its preface. It is intended solely to inspire relieving, if morally unprofitable, contemplation of people who can recreate the semblance of gaiety in lamentably inappropriate circumstances.

R E S

CAST

KATHIE
ERNEST
ELENA
DOCTOR ANTON KRUG
OLD KRUG
ILSE
EMIL
FRAU LUCHER
COUNT VON STAINZ
COUNTESS VON STAINZ
POFFY
A PORTER
ANOTHER PORTER
STRUP
BREDZI
TWO WAITERS
TWO BUS BOYS
A BELL BOY
TORLINI
A POLICEMAN
CHEF
RUDOLF MAXIMILLIAN
GISELLA VON KRETT
GENERAL HOETZLER
SOPHIA
KOEPPKE
TALISZ
A VALET
JANSEI

SCENES

ACT I

The drawing-room in the house of Doctor
Anton Krug, in Vienna Late Afternoon

ACT II

The ante room of the Imperial Suite, Hotel
Lucher, in Vienna Early evening

ACT III

Same as Act I Late evening

(The curtain is lowered during Act III to
indicate the passage of several hours)

Time August 18th, 1930

ACT I

The scene is the living room in the home of PROFESSOR DOCTOR ANTON KRUG in Vienna. It is late in the afternoon of August 18th, 1930 a date which marks the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of the late Emperor Franz Josef I

The room is ultra modernistic in the style of its decorations and furnishings, but there is conveyed through the colours of the curtains and upholstery a suggestion of old fashioned warmth

At the right, downstage, is a double door, leading to a hall and the staircase. In the upstage right angle of the scene is a long window, looking out upon a sea of horse chestnut trees. At the back of the room, in the centre, a few steps lead up to a little landing. On this open the door leading to FRAU KRUG'S boudoir and, to the left of it, the entrance to the hall which leads to the bedrooms

Upstage left is the door leading to DR. KRUG'S offices, and, downstage left, a fire place

Before the fire place is a seat. Slightly to the left of stage centre is a large couch, the back of which forms a bookcase. Toward the right is a thickly upholstered easy chair, and two or three chairs that are not so easy. There is a window seat, and between it and the landing at the back is an American radio cabinet

As the curtain rises, the stage is empty, but from the radio come the sounds of a jazz tune

After a moment, the door at the right opens and KATHIE comes in. She is a stout, competent, middle aged servant. Behind her comes ERNEST, a venerable, jovial laundryman, bearing a brimming hamper of clean linen

KATHIE Put it down there (She indicates the couch, then goes up to the radio)

ERNEST Yes, my dear (He puts the laundry basket by the sofa)

KATHIE (*muttering as she turns off the radio*) He always goes out and leaves it on when he knows it annoys the Herr Doctor (*She goes up the steps and knocks on the door of FRAU KRUG's room*) Frau Krug

ELENA (*from off stage*) Yes ?

KATHIE The laundry's here (*She comes down and addresses ERNEST in a peremptory tone*) She wants to count it herself—and heaven help you if there's anything missing

ERNEST Not so much as a doily, upon my word (*ELENA comes out of her room, and walks quickly down to the couch. She is thirty two years old, slim, serene, self possessed and almost imperceptibly malicious. Unquestionably above reproach as the envied wife of the distinguished DR. KRUG, ELENA remains a lively subject for speculative discussion. There is no doubt that she is a lady of fashion—was born so, indeed—though she is now wearing a severely simple apron smock and appearing as a model of brisk, housewifely competence. She smiles amiably at ERNEST*)

ELENA Good afternoon, Ernest

ERNEST (*bowing*) Frau Krug ! Good afternoon Warming up a bit, isn't it ?

ELENA Yes—it s lovely All right, Kathie I have the list (*KATHIE starts taking the folded pairs of drawers from the basket, pair by pair, and putting them on the couch. ELENA holds a laundry book and pencil with which she confirms the numbers of items announced by KATHIE*)

KATHIE Seven pairs of drawers

ELENA Seven That's right Here—let me see how they've been done (*KATHIE hands her a pair, which ELENA unfolds and inspects*)

ERNEST Beautifully laundered, Frau Krug, with creamy softness to caress your skin

ELENA Not my skin—my husband's

ERNEST (*bowing*) Ten thousand pardons

ELENA How about the shirts ?

KATHIE (*piling them up*) One—two—three—four—five—six—seven (DR ANTON KRUG *has come in from the left He is a tall, powerful, handsome man of forty five, bespectacled, correctly dressed in an essentially Teutonic morning coat with striped trousers His hands are those of a peasant rather than of a deft surgeon, and he is conscious of them He speaks quietly, but in his deep voice is the resonance of assurance He knows whereof he speaks*)

ANTON Elena What are you doing ? (*He comes close to ELENA*)

ELENA Now don't bother me, Anton How many undershirts ?

KATHIE Two—four—six—seven

ELENA Seven That's right (*To ANTON*) I'm counting the laundry (*KATHIE begins to count out socks*)

KATHIE One pair, two—three—four—— (*She goes on*)

ANTON (*smiling*) Forgive me, Elena—but will this great task keep you occupied for very long ?

ELENA No Why ?

ANTON There are a couple of students of mine out there

KATHIE (*mumbling*) Eleven pairs socks

ANTON Would you mind talking to them while they're waiting ? I want them to have a good look at you

ELENA No, dear, by all means, send them in Did you say eleven ?

KATHIE Yes, ma'am Five woollen, six silk

ELENA That's right I'd better not let them see me with all this wash

ANTON (*smiling*) No, it might disillusion them They imagine you as glamorous, regal

ELENA (*interested*) Ah ! Do they ?

ANTON Where they got such ideas, I don't know

ELENA Perhaps they're very young ? (*KATHIE is putting the laundry back into the basket*)

ANTON They are—young, and painfully earnest They're badly in need of a few lessons in the cultivation of grace

ELENA (*rising*) This apron isn't very glamorous, either (*OLD KRUG ambles in from the right, carrying the evening paper He is ANTON'S father, a gentle old man, an ex cobbler, who doesn't entirely like the way things have been going since Austria was made safe for democracy*)

ANTON No, I'm reasonably sure you can do better than that

KRUG Better than what ?

ELENA If you can keep them waiting a little while I shall do better (*She goes up to the steps at the back*)

ANTON Thanks, Elena I'll deposit them in here (*He goes out at the left*)

KRUG Deposit who ? What's happening ?

ELENA (*at the door to her room*) Bring the laundry in here (*She goes out, leaving the door open*)

ERNEST Gladly, Frau Krug (*He lifts the basket KATHIE picks up the folded drawers and shirts from the couch and goes into the room ERNEST is following her, but OLD KRUG intercepts him*)

KRUG Oh, Ernest !

ERNEST (*turning and bowing*) Herr Krug !

KRUG (*excitedly*) Have you heard any more about to night ?

ERNEST (*importantly*) I have ! I was just over at Lucher's Hotel, and they're in a great state about it They expect upwards of a hundred people !

KRUG (*impressed*) A hundred ! The police aren't going to stop it, are they ?

ERNEST (*with assurance*) Noooo ! Old Frau Lucher has bribed the authorities (KATHIE appears in the bedroom door)

KATHIE (*from the landing*) She told you to come in here !

ERNEST Coming ! (*He winks at KRUG, and goes out with his basket* KRUG goes over to the radio, twists the dials, then turns it on A speech in Russian is coming through He listens attentively ANTON comes in from the left, followed by the students, EMIL LOIBNER and ILSE HINRICH EMIL is dark, bespectacled, poorly, carelessly dressed ILSE might be blondly beautiful if she cared to be She is eager and ambitious, but a trifle bewildered)

ANTON Right in here, please

ILSE I hope we're not disturbing Frau Krug

ANTON No, no ! She's eager to meet you

EMIL She's very kind

ANTON (*to OLD KRUG*) Father ! Turn that off !

KRUG But it's that trial in Moscow

ANTON Yes, and you can't understand a word of it Turn it off !

KRUG (*with dejected resignation*) Oh, very well (*He does so*)

ANTON This is my father (ILSE and EMIL bow and murmur "Herr Krug—how do you do ?")
Two of my students—Ilse Hinrich and Emil

Loibner (*KRUG mumbles a churlish greeting and ambles up to the window seat whereon he sits to read his paper*) My wife will be here in a minute I have one more patient to see before we can begin our work A dreadful woman ! She came all the way from—where is it ?—Pennsylvania, to learn about the more elementary facts of life She's married too, with grown children (*He laughs*) What sort of husbands do you suppose they have in Pennsylvania that their wives must come all the way to Vienna to learn the facts ? (*EMIL and ILSE laugh obediently at the Professor's little joke*) Now when my wife comes in I want you both to be very charming—rather than scientific Do you understand that ?

EMIL You don't need to tell us that, Herr Professor

ANTON Of course not You're already a good psychiatrist And you too, Ilse

ILSE Oh, I don't know anything yet

ANTON You stick at it for two or three years and you'll know everything—as Emil does (*He slaps EMIL's shoulder and goes out at the left Ill at ease ILSE sits down on the edge of the couch EMIL takes up a defensive position before the fire-place*)

ILSE What shall we say to her ?

EMIL Well, I imagine we should flatter her That's the right thing to do

ILSE I know—but about what ?

EMIL You ought to know You're a woman

KRUG (*unexpectedly*) Tell her you admire this room

ILSE Oh ! (*They are both startled, having forgotten KRUG*)

KRUG She likes to be praised about all this—decoration (*With a none too approving sweep of the hand*)

EMIL Is it—is the decoration her work ?

KRUG Every bit of it She stood over the carpenters and painters and told them what to do

ILSE It's tremendously effective !

KRUG Maybe (*He rises and crosses towards ILSE*) But as for me—it's—I don't know—I don't like it ! It just isn't natural Do you know what she said when she was having it done ? She said " We won't have one thing in this house to look as if there ever was a past We must believe we know nothing of what went on in the world before 1920 We are beginning new " she said Crazy notions ! (*He chuckles*) But all the same she's smart She can tell you young people some things that are good for you to know And what's more, she will tell you if you ask her the right (*ERNEST comes out of ELENA'S room, carrying his empty basket*)

ERNEST Well, the laundry added up perfectly

KRUG Good ! I need a clean shirt

ILSE (*in an undertone to EMIL*) I still } Together
don't know what to say to her }

EMIL Sh !

ERNEST And if I hear any more about that certain affair I'll let you know

KRUG Oh, please do, Ernest, because if there is a rumpus, they won't let the papers print anything about it Do you think there will be a rumpus ?

ERNEST (*knowingly*) Unless I miss my guess there'll be a good one

KRUG Oh, I hope so

ERNEST Believe me, they're eager to have Frau Krug there (*KATHIE comes out of ELENA'S room*)

KRUG Oh, I can believe that

KATHIE Come on, now—we're through with you (*She crosses to the right*)

ERNEST Yes, my dear

ILSE (*to EMIL*) What was that about Frau Krug? (*EMIL cautions her to silence*)

KRUG Good afternoon, Ernest

ERNEST Good afternoon, Herr Krug (*He goes out at the right, followed by KATHIE*)

KRUG Herr Krug! (*He chuckles as he turns back to the students*) He and I used to go to school together, and now he calls me "Herr ' Krug. That's because I'm the father of my son. As if I deserved the credit (*He comes close to ILSE*) Do you want to know something?

ILSE About Frau Krug?

KRUG (*paying no attention to her question*) I never saw what was in my boy. Neither did his mother. We wanted him to follow my trade—shoe-making. But he had big ideas. He had to be a surgeon *and* a revolutionist. Even when he was wearing short pants he was telling us that science was going to cure everyone of every thing. He was the wildest talker.

EMIL Because he knew the truth.

KRUG Well—he'd have been better off if he'd kept his mouth closed. They didn't like to be talked about the way he talked. They punished him.

ILSE Who were they?

EMIL The Habsburgs!

ILSE Oh!

KRUG Yes—that's who it was. They were smart, too. Whenever things became too hot for 'em here at home they'd start another war and send all the worst of the trouble makers into the front line. They did that with him. They put

him to work patching up all the soldiers they'd broken there in Gorizia—patching 'em up so that they could send 'em out to be broken again. But do you know what he said about it? He said it was murder they were doing—that the enemy were our comrades. Comrades! The Italians! And on top of all that, every soldier that was sent to him was marked unfit for further military service. He told 'em all to go home. But *they* soon put a stop to that. They took away his commission from him and made him a labourer in their stone quarries, and that's why he could never be a surgeon again. They crushed his hands with their stones!

ILSE How *horrible*!

EMIL (*fervently*) That's one of the crimes that we must never forget!

KRUG Oh, it didn't upset him. He said, 'If I can't use my hands to chop people to pieces, I can still use *this* (*He taps his head*). And he did. And now they don't put him in prison for what he says. They *pay* him! Why—they sent for my boy all the way from America, and he went across the ocean to tell those Americans how to live. *They* didn't know. And when he came back he brought me a present—that wireless machine there. Did you ever see as fine a one as that? (*He gazes lovingly at the radio*). It's mine—but they won't let me play it.

[ELENA comes in, now wearing a graceful tea gown]

ILSE Oh—that's too bad! (EMIL signals to ILSE to behold FRAU KRUG)

EMIL (*bowing*) Frau Krug!

ELENA (*shaking hands with ILSE, who rises*) How do you do?

ILSE (*timorously*) How do you do, Frau Krug?

ELENA Father—aren't you going to introduce us ?

KRUG I don't know their names They're students (*He goes over to the right and sits down with his pipe and his newspaper*)

ELENA (*to EMIL*) I'm afraid I've kept you waiting

EMIL (*stiffly*) Oh, no We are the intruders The Herr Professor's with a patient

KRUG It's a lady who came all the way from Pennsylvania with complaints

EMIL If I may say so, Frau Krug I well—I (*There is an awkward pause*)

ELENA Why, my dear boy—of course you may say anything

EMIL Well, I it was nothing

ELENA Oh, come—it must have been something You're embarrassed

EMIL (*with a sheepish laugh*) I'm afraid so

KRUG He was going to say that he doesn't believe *you* have any complaints, like that woman out there

EMIL I was going to say nothing of the kind It was something entirely different—a—a compliment——

ELENA Oh—but that would have been the highest compliment of all !

ILSE (*nervously*) I think, Frau Krug—I think that Emil meant to say that we both admire the imaginativeness of this room

ELENA Oh ! I should have liked that too Now—do sit down and tell me how you are getting on with your studies (*They all sit*)

ILSE I'm afraid I don't know very much yet
You see I'm new Emil is the Professor's
favourite

ELENA Really ! What does the Professor teach
you ?

ILSE Everything !

ELENA Oh ?

ILSE I mean, everything that's worth knowing

ELENA For example ?

ILSE (*lamely*) Well—he makes us understand
that if you'll only *think* right, you'll *live* right I
mean—if you can make what's in your sub-
conscious come to the surface—then you'll
know what it is—and you'll know what to do
about it

EMIL (*unable longer to curb his eloquence*) No, no !
It's infinitely more than that He's gone far be-
yond psycho-analysis He teaches us the gospel
of the better life—the life that is seen through
the eyes of the biologist's microscope and in the
changing colours of the chemist's test tube He
teaches us that the forward progress of man must
be regulated by the statistician's inexorable
curve, and not by the encyclicals of priests or the
ukases of kings He teaches us to banish from
the world all false fear of God—to know Him,
and recognise Him only as a measurable force
in cosmic technology He teaches us to look into
ourselves—our bodies, our minds—and not to
the vague hills of mysticism, for the knowledge
that will set us free

ELENA Well—that *does* cover about every-
thing, doesn't it ? (*She treats EMIL to a sympathetic
smile*) And when you have absorbed all the
knowledge there is, what will you do with it ?

EMIL I shall try to carry it to others—to share
it with all mankind

ELENA I see You're to be another Paul

EMIL Another Paul ?

ELENA Yes—Paul ! The Apostle !

EMIL Oh—yes

ELENA (*to ILSE*) And how about you ?

ILSE I suppose there'll be plenty of work for all of us

EMIL (*rising*) You see, Madam—the world is very young

ELENA Very *young* ?

EMIL Why—hardly more than ten years ago we were living under conditions of mediævalism

ELENA Ten years !

EMIL When I look at the decaying relics of the old order, the gaunt, empty palace of the Habsburgs, and the silly monuments they erected to their own glory—I bless the war and the revolution that delivered us from the tyranny of ignorance

ELENA And what do you say when you look at me ?

ILSE At *you*, Frau Krug ? What possible connection has that ?

ELENA I'm one of the relics of the middle ages, of ten years ago (*ANTON comes in from the left*)

EMIL You are the wife of the most enlightened scientist in Austria

ANTON Emil ! I overheard that last remark

EMIL Yes sir

ANTON I'm afraid you must have misunderstood me I wanted you to flatter her, not me (*He goes to the bookcase at the back*)

ELENA They've been charming, both of them

ANTON (*casually looking for a book*) I'm glad to hear it The one thing these students have difficulty in developing is the correct bedside manner Is that copy of *Sons and Lovers* here ?

ELENA I think it's there—somewhere

ANTON I want to give it to that Pennsylvania woman It might help her Ah—here it is

ELENA What's the trouble with her ?

ANTON The usual one—another frustration ! For twenty years she's been measuring her poor husband in terms of her first love—the one that got away

ELENA And what are you prescribing, beside that book ?

ANTON She must find her first lover, and have a good look at him as he is now He's a manufacturer of dental supplies I think she'll be cured (*He smiles at ELENA and goes out at the left*)

ELENA I hope he does help her It must be awful to be always unsatisfied, and puzzled

EMIL (*with complete conviction*) He'll cure her—if she has the capacity to understand

ELENA You worship him, don't you ?

EMIL All youth must worship him He is leading us from the darkness—into the light

ELENA Do you hear that, father ? Your son is a god

KRUG Yes—that's what they say

ILSE Frau Krug

ELENA Yes, dear

ILSE (*hesitantly*) There's a question I'd like to ask You see—the point is that we, Emil and I—we know only the present, the age of reason

since the Revolution You know something of the past

EMIL (*reproving her quietly*) Ilse

ELENA That's quite all right Why shouldn't I know the past? I'm old enough to be your mother (*They both protest*) Well, practically Now, come—what was the question that you want to ask?

KRUG She wants you to tell her what you know of the Habsburgs

EMIL Frau Krug—I swear that we pay no attention to the scandalous gossip that evil, malicious bourgeois

ELENA (*cutting in*) Oh, but you should You want to be psycho-analysts, don't you?

ILSE Well

EMIL Of course we do!

ELENA Then there's every reason for you to do research work

EMIL Research work is to be done in the laboratory—not in the drawing room

ELENA My dear boy—when you have been fully inoculated with the germ of scientific culture you will realise that all the world is your laboratory—and all the men and women in it merely guinea pigs I'm one of them—and I'm here to be explored As a matter of fact, I'm a peculiarly interesting specimen—ask my husband if I'm not He'll tell you that most of his vast knowledge of human frailty comes from observation of me (*To ILSE*) Now, please! Just what did you want to know?

ILSE It would be helpful to know how you see all the changes—whether you think we are advanced, for all our knowledge, or

ELENA Aren't you content to take my

husband's word for it that the world has improved ?

EMIL I ask for no other assurance I need none

ELENA (*to EMIL*) I know But—(*to ILSE*)—I gather that you're not so sure

ILSE (*tremulous*) The trouble is—I'm not sure of myself

ELENA Oh ?

ILSE I—I had an experience

ELENA Ah ! I see ! (*She draws her chair closer to ILSE KRUG, who has been listening, draws his a bit nearer*) Tell me about it

ILSE (*hesitantly*) It was very strange, and terribly disturbing I've tried to account for my emotional reaction to it, but I can't do it I was in Nice on my vacation, and I called a taxi When I was in it, I happened to look in the little mirror, above the driver's seat, and I saw his eyes He was staring at me, openly, insolently They were the queerest eyes I've ever seen I kept looking at them—although I didn't want to I felt sure I'd seen him before He was driving frightfully fast—on those narrow roads that run along the brinks of cliffs—crazily That wasn't where I wanted to go at all, but I'd forgotten about that I thought the cab would go over the edge any minute Finally, I screamed out to him to stop—but I was so terrified that I forgot to say it in French And with that he did stop, and stepped from his seat in the front and climbed into the inside of the taxi and sat down beside me And he said,

I thought so ! There was something about your eyelids that identified you as a Viennese I am Viennese too In fact, *I'm one of those who imparted to Vienna its now faded glory* " Then he put his arms around me and gave me a long kiss

KRUG (*softly*) Well—well——

ELENA (*slowly*) A taxi driver

ILSE He kissed me so that I couldn't seem to utter a word of protest I tried to tell myself that he was nothing more than an emotional extravert—but that didn't seem to help me Then he said "Permit me to introduce myself I am the Archduke Rudolf Maximilian von Habsburg

ELENA (*nodding*) Yes ! (KRUG *laughs boisterously* ELENA *rises*) Father !

[KRUG *stifles his mirth*

EMIL I don't believe it It was probably some impostor

ILSE No I asked them at the hotel when I got back They told me he was well known in Nice

KRUG How long was it *before* you got back ?

ILSE Oh, he took me right back You see, he'd stopped his cab in the middle of the road, blocking traffic, and some policemen came along, so he had to remember he was a taxi driver (*A little sadly*)

KRUG Oh, dear

EMIL (*to ILSE, in an undertone*) You've said about enough !

ELENA What did he look like ?

ILSE He looked as if he'd stepped right out of one of those portraits in the old palace

ELENA Yes ! I know Those full, rich lips

ILSE (*in ardent agreement*) Yes ! That's why I thought I'd seen him before And when I wanted to pay him the fare, he waved it away, and said, Nonsense, my dear—on this ride, you have been my guest ! "

KRUG I should say you had (*He laughs*) Just

like him ! Isn't it, Elena ? Just exactly like all of them

EMIL (*vehemently*) If I had been there, I should have punched his nose

ELENA No—I don't think you would have

ILSE Indeed, you wouldn't ! It's all very well for you to talk—but if you'd seen him as I did, you wouldn't have been able to say a word except, " Yes, your Imperial Highness ! "

ELENA (*to ILSE*) I gather that you considered the experience not entirely disagreeable

ILSE I can't decide what I think about it

ELENA Have you consulted Doctor Krug ?

ILSE I haven't had the courage to confess to him how weak I was

KRUG You don't have to consult him Elena—you know more about these things than Anton ever will, with all his experiments Tell them about that time when the old Emperor caught you and Rudolf Maximilian, posing on the fountain at Schönbrunn, both naked as the day you were born

ILSE (*gasping*) Oh—then you *knew* him !

KRUG *Knew* him ! (*He can't contain his merriment*)

ILSE Oh—then I've said something awful

EMIL Yes !

ELENA No, my dear It wasn't awful at all I enjoyed every word of it (*ANTON has come in*) Anton, you should have stayed away for another half hour I was just about to give your students a lecture

ANTON On what subject ?

ELENA On the past

ANTON Whose ?

ELENA Mine

ANTON Then don't let me interrupt Proceed with it, at once It's very exciting

ELENA No, it isn't It's very dull But (to ILSE) you were right about one thing—it is instructive And you also (to EMIL) were right, in all those eloquent speeches you made about the better life Oh, Anton, you'd have been proud of him

ANTON (*smiling*) Go on with your own lecture

ELENA (*to the students*) It is a better life—and I can say that with authority I was one of the many evils of the old régime—I and that weird taxi driver who entertained you in his cab

ANTON What is all this ?

ELENA She had an encounter with Rudolf

ANTON (*startled*) Here in Vienna ?

ELENA No—in Nice

ANTON (*relieved*) Oh !

ELENA (*to ILSE*) You must tell him all about it He'll analyse your emotional reactions, as he analysed mine I needed his treatment—(*she looks at ANTON, there is an exchange of understanding between them*)—a great deal of it He cured me—and I delivered myself, body and mind, to the new god (*She puts her hand on ANTON'S shoulder*) You need have no doubts as to the legitimacy of that god You can believe in him, you can worship him, you can follow him to the last statistic !

EMIL (*fervently*) Your words are inspiring, Madam !

ELENA I intended them to be

ANTON Well ! All this is elevating our studies to an alarmingly high plane (*KATHIE enters from the right, carrying a silver plate on which are several cards*) However, if you neophytes will step into my office, we'll celebrate high mass

KATHIE Some callers, ma'am

KRUG (*rising*) Who? Who is it?

ELENA Just a minute, Kathie
Good bye, Ilse, and don't worry } (*Together*)
about those emotions They're not
uncommon

ILSE I know—that's what worries me (KRUG
*has gone to KATHIE to have a look at the cards on the
plate*)

ELENA Good bye, Emil

EMIL You remember my name!

ELENA Yes, that's one good result of my
education under the Habsburgs

KRUG (*excitedly*) Elena!

ELENA (*not stopping*) I was trained to remember
(*She beams upon EMIL*)

KRUG Elena! It's the Count and Countess
von Stainz

ELENA (*startled*) Von Stainz? (*She leaves EMIL
abruptly to look at the cards*)

KRUG And Frau Lucher, the old lady herself
—and that Povoromo, that guide

ELENA (*to KATHIE*) They're *here*?

KATHIE Yes, ma'am

KRUG Certainly they're here, and I know
why

KATHIE They're downstairs in the hall—they
beg to see you

ANTON (*to the students*) Will you wait in the
office? I'll be with you in a minute (ILSE and
EMIL *go out at the left*)

KRUG I can tell you *exactly* what they're after!

ANTON What do they want?

KRUG They want her to go to that party at
Lucher's Hotel!

ANTON Party ! What party ?

KRUG They're having a big celebration ! There's going to be a rumpus ! (*He is in a high state of glee at this unexpected development, but no one is paying any attention to him*)

ELENA (*to* ANTON) It's the hundredth anniversary of the birth of that noble monarch, Franz Josef the First Frau Lucher thought that it should be fittingly observed

KRUG Yes, and she's bribed the police !

ANTON Well—what about it ?

KRUG They want Elena to go, that's what about it !

ANTON Do you want to go, Elena ?

ELENA Anton !

ANTON What ?

ELENA I don't want to see these people

ANTON Why not ? They're friends of yours, aren't they ?

ELENA They were, a long time ago

ANTON Well, then—in that case—I can't see why (*He sees KATHIE*) Wait in the hall, Kathie

KATHIE Yes, Herr Doctor (*She goes out at the right and shuts the door*)

KRUG Why do you want her to wait in the hall ?

ANTON If they're old friends of yours, I can't see any reason why you should refuse them
Unless

ELENA Unless what ?

ANTON Unless there might be disagreeable associations

ELENA (*with surprising vehemence*) Of course there are disagreeable associations ! The Count

and Countess von Stainz are dreadful people
They were two of the worst of the court toadies

ANTON But what about this Povoromo ? He's
a harmless and rather pathetic professional
guide There's nothing upsetting about

KRUG But don't you remember—he was one of
the cronies of the Archduke

ANTON And Frau Lucher—what's wrong with
her ?

ELENA I hate her ! I hate the sight of her
hotel !

ANTON Why ? Because it was the scene of
so many of your youthful indiscretions with
him !

KRUG Are you talking about Rudolf Maxi-
milian ?

ANTON That damned name again ! (*He crosses
to the door at the left*) Now please, Elena—if you
don't want to see them, then don't see them
But don't ask me what to do I have those
students on my hands I'm very busy (*He goes
out*)

KRUG Did you hear what he said about that
damned name ? He can't seem to get over it

[ELENA crosses to the right]

ELENA Kathie

KATHIE Yes, ma'am

ELENA Tell them to come up

KATHIE Yes, ma'am

KRUG (*delighted*) That's the way, Elena ! (*He
sits down and makes himself entirely comfortable*)
It'll do you good to talk to 'em I often think
you don't see half enough of your old friends

ELENA Go to your room, Father

KRUG Why ?

ELENA Because I want you to

KRUG But I'd like to have a look at them

ELENA Go on ! Please

KRUG (*going*) Oh, dear ! They never let me see anything interesting that goes on in this house (*He has shuffled out at the upper left*)

[KATHIE returns, holding open the door]

KATHIE In here, please (*FRAU LUCHER comes in She is a formidable old party, absurdly dressed in ancient clothes, but imposing Her voice is gruff, her expression unchangeably hostile, her manner toward all arrogant and despotic Behind her come the COUNT and COUNTESS VON STAINZ and POFFY The COUNT is about fifty five On his grey countenance are the ravages of time, disappointment, and drink His courtliness, however, is unimpaired The COUNTESS, about fifty, is dowdy and excessively emotional POFFY is a tragic but gallant ex officer of the Imperial Army, who is now engaged in the great work of guiding American tourists about the Hofburg*)

ELENA Tatti ! I'm so glad

COUNTESS Elena ! My angel ! My beautiful little angel ! (*She rushes into an embrace*)

ELENA (*to the COUNT, over the COUNTESS's shoulder*) Hello, Franz, how are you ?

COUNT Not very well, thank you (*POFFY and LUCHER have hung back, as though dubious of the quality of their reception*)

ELENA I'm so sorry Hello, Poffy

POFFY (*bowing*) Elena !

ELENA Good afternoon, Frau Lucher

LUCHER Good afternoon, Frau Krug

COUNTESS But, my *darling* ! Ten years have passed and you are not one day older Look at her, Franz !

COUNT I have been looking at her

LUCHER Would you mind if I sat down ? (*She sits, heavily, on a chair at the left*)

ELENA No Everybody sit down

LUCHER My feet hurt

COUNTESS I can't take my eyes off you, my little angel You're lovely ' I'm about to sob '

ELENA Now don't be embarrassing, Tatti

LUCHER Let her sob if it'll make her any happier

COUNT Don't mind our gaping at you, Elena It makes us think that maybe we haven't grown old, either

ELENA Where have you been ?

COUNTESS In a ghastly London suburb

COUNT Upper Tooting, if you must know

COUNTESS Breathing in English fog, eating English food

COUNT And drinking English beer

LUCHER That isn't beer '

COUNT Which reminds me, Elena—my throat is parched

COUNTESS Franz '

COUNT Would it be causing you too much trouble if I

LUCHER He's asking for a drink (*ELENA goes up to a table on which are a decanter and some glasses*)

ELENA I have some port here—would port do ?

COUNT Admirably '

COUNTESS I told you you were not to touch a drop '

COUNT We've had a long train journey and I simply must wash the cinders from my gullet

COUNTESS Elena, don't give it to him '

ELENA Oh, a little port can't hurt him, Tatti (*She hands him the glass*)

COUNT Of course not Your health, my dear

LUCHER Do you mind if I smoke ?

ELENA No, have a cigarette (LUCHER *has opened her enormous black handbag and extracted therefrom a large silver cigar-case*)

LUCHER You needn't bother (*She takes out a cigar, and bites off the end*)

ELENA Still smoking the same brand ?

LUCHER No, those Cubans no longer send the cream of the crop to Vienna (*POFFY steps forward to light the cigar*)

COUNTESS There is nothing the same here After ten years of exile—to find this Oh, Elena,—if you only *knew* what we've been through *I've* been a seamstress, my darling A *seamstress* ! Making sensible underwear for English frumps We've gone without lunch for three months in order to save enough to be here And I give you my word, when we arrived here this morning, and drove through the streets, we wept—we literally *wept*—to see that our beloved Vienna is undergoing its last, gruesome agonies

ELENA Those aren't death agonies that you see, Tatti They're the throes of childbirth A new life is being created

COUNTESS You may well say that (*She looks about the room*) The new life seems to have done well for you

ELENA Yes, it has ! (*There is, perhaps, a suggestion of defiance in this*)

COUNT (*tactfully*) And by the way—I hope we're to be presented to your husband

ELENA I'm afraid he's rather busy just now

COUNTESS What's he like this doctor of yours ?

ELENA Well—he's brilliant, and charming, and kind

POFFY And famous ! When I'm guiding American tourists past here, I point with pride—

'Residence of the eminent Dr Krug'—and they're thrilled

ELENA (*smiling*) Especially the women

POFFY Ah, yes !

LUCHER Isn't it about time to come to the main subject ? That is—if you all feel that there have been enough polite preliminaries

ELENA There's no great hurry

POFFY By all means ! Proceed, Lucher !

LUCHER Well—the main subject is this, in so many words they want you to change your mind about attending the party this evening. They begged me to come with them, and talk with you on the supposition that I can terrorise anyone into doing anything I ask. Strictly between ourselves I don't think you'll be missing much if you don't come. By the looks of this gathering, it won't be very

COUNTESS If that's what you think, then why are you giving this party ?

COUNT Why have you invited us ?

LUCHER Even I have my sentimental moments, Countess. When I realised that this was the hundredth anniversary, I thought that we might have a revival of the old insanity, for one evening, at my expense. I thought there might be a bit of amusement. However, I've decided that I was over-optimistic—so now you know how I feel about all this, Frau Krug, and perhaps you'll be good enough to tell them how *you* feel, and get it over with.

COUNT You really can't disappoint us, Elena. We've looked forward so to this, and to having you there, laughing, in the way you always laughed.

ELENA But that's just it, Franz. I couldn't laugh. I'd probably weep.

COUNTESS Splendid ! We'll all weep together,
and have a glorious time !

LUCHER And when you've become sufficiently
gloomy, you'll start throwing bottles through
windows I know !

ELENA Who's to be here ?

COUNT Well—old General Hoetzler is ex-
pected

ELENA Is he ?

COUNT Do you know what he's doing now ?
He's a train announcer in the railway station
at Erfurt

ELENA The poor old dear

COUNTESS And Talisz is coming He's a book-
keeper, somewhere or other And then the two
Koeppkes—I forget what they do

LUCHER They run a lodging house in Zermatt
—and I've *heard*

ALL Yes ?

LUCHER Well—never mind

POFFY And the beautiful Gisella von Krett
She's here already

ELENA Gisella !

POFFY She's a governess with a Sicilian family
in Palermo

ELENA And who else ? Is there anyone else ?

POFFY Well—of course there were a good
many who wanted to come but they were—
lacking in funds

COUNT Oh, but more will turn up at the last
minute to help us consume Lucher's champagne
It's sure to be the jolliest gathering

LUCHER Did I say that champagne would be
served ?

COUNT I have never attended a party at the
Hotel Lucher without champagne

POFFY You're thinking of the days when we paid—and well—for our drinks

ELENA Oh, I think Frau Lucher won't be stingy with her champagne Will you?

COUNT That's right, Elena You were the only one who could ever order her about You and Rudolf (LUCHER *bursts out laughing*) What in God's name are you roaring at?

LUCHER I was just thinking of something (*She is still emitting gusty, gaseous roars of laughter*)

POFFY (to ELENA) I gather it was something mildly amusing

LUCHER Oh, you remember it, Poffy—the night that Rudolf gave her the diamond necklace You were there

POFFY I was indeed

LUCHER He came stalking into my cafe at two o'clock in the morning—cursing at me—cursing at Strup—presenting medals to the bus boys He said he had to have a magnum of 1812 a basket of pomegranates, and a diamond necklace for Fräulein Vervesz—at once!—or he'd break every bone in my old body I had to rout Barnowsky the jeweller out of bed to get the diamonds

COUNT (*laughing*) Served him right, the old bandit

LUCHER (to ELENA) And when I gave His Imperial Highness the necklace, he never said so much as a 'Thank you' He merely snatched it, and then threw it into your lap

ELENA (to LUCHER) No, no! That wasn't what he did He didn't give me the necklace until later, when we were upstairs He first took hold of my hand and said, "Isn't it about time for a dance?" Then he waltzed me out of the room, and on the way out we bumped into you

[ANTON comes in

LUCHER But I burned his neck with my cigar

[*They all laugh—but their mirth congeals when they see* ANTON *The COUNT and POFFY rise*

ELENA Anton, are you finished with the students already ?

ANTON Yes, I dismissed them I was anxious to meet your friends

ELENA (*surprised*) Oh This is my husband

ANTON How do you do, Frau Lucher ?

ELENA The Count and Countess von Stainz—Herr Povoromo (*There are murmured salutations*)

ANTON Yes I know Herr Povoromo

COUNT Herr Professor Doctor—permit me to felicitate you upon your wife She is quite the most gracious, the most sympathetic and the loveliest of ladies

ANTON (*bowing*) I am inclined to agree with you

COUNTESS Herr Professor—we came to beg Elera, to plead with her, to be with us this evening

COUNT It isn't so much a matter of pleading—though we'll do that, too, heaven knows But we do want to assure her what a delightful occasion

LUCHER (*flatly*) The fact is that, without Frau Krug, the party will be a disaster

ANTON (*amiably*) Well—in that case—I hope she'll go

COUNTESS There, Elena, that settles it ! Your husband approves

LUCHER Perhaps the Herr Professor Doctor will also attend ?

ANTON Oh, that's very kind of you, but I really couldn't I'm afraid I shouldn't quite belong

ELENA I've been afraid I shouldn't belong

either But now I m beginning to think that it might be great fun

COUNT Good for you, Elena !

COUNTESS And good for you, Herr Doctor ! You are worthy of her !

COUNT You re going to make this occasion a memorable one

LUCHER (*with an air of finality*) Well, now that that s settled, we can go

POFFY (*stepping forward hesitantly*) Just one minute, Elena

ELENA Yes, Poffy

POFFY Elena—I—think I know why you re changing your mind

ELENA Why ?

POFFY Because you realise this celebration will be nothing more than a gathering of broken down old outcasts, like myself—with no one to give us animation, no one to give us the illusion of youth but I m afraid that it may not be quite what you expect

LUCHER What are you *talking* about ?

POFFY (*deliberately*) I received a message this afternoon

ELENA Yes ? (*As though she had expected this*)

POFFY I was instructed to say nothing about it to anyone But I think you should know about it before you go to that party , and you too should know, Herr Professor if I might have a word with you in private

COUNTESS In private ? What on earth

POFFY You ll forgive me

COUNT (*stepping toward Poffy*) Rudolf ?

ELENA He s to be here ?

LUCHER No !

POFFY He left Nice yesterday on his way to Vienna

COUNTESS Rudolf !

COUNT (*exultantly*) I can't believe it ! It's too good to

ANTON Will they allow him to cross the border ?

LUCHER (*emphatically*) No ! They'll never let him in after all the things he's said and done The officials are so stupid that the smaller fry can sneak past them, begging your pardon, Count and Countess , but they're not so stupid as to allow the most violent member of the Habsburg faction to get back into Austria

POFFY Regardless of all that, Elena—I thought you should know I ask your pardon, Herr Professor, for having mentioned the subject

ANTON Not at all There's nothing I can say It's for Elena to decide

ELENA I'm not going

COUNTESS But, my little angel—what Lucher said is true He couldn't possibly come into the country

ELENA I'm not going !

COUNT You can't change your mind, Elena We need you You've always made things go Have you forgotten all those times when

ELENA Yes I have forgotten And my dear old friends, I advise you to forget, too

COUNTESS You're asking a great deal of people who have nothing but memories to live on

ELENA That's just it ! You're trying to live on something that doesn't exist That's why you're all so degraded and spent That's why you have to drug yourselves with such infantile pretence as this reunion Wallowing in sentiment ! Weeping into your beer !

COUNTESS I never hope to hear a more heartless, brutal statement—and from you, Elena, of all people

ELENA I know it's brutal—and I feel miserable for having said it, if that's any consolation to you. But it's all true, every word of it. You know it is.

LUCHER Of course it's true! I only wish you'd said it all to me before I'd let myself in for this nonsense.

COUNTESS It would have been kinder to have told your servant to deny us admission.

ELENA Yes.

COUNTESS To have slammed the door in our faces.

ELENA You're right, Tatti.

COUNT (to POFFY) Why didn't you have sense enough to obey orders and keep that information to yourself?

ELENA (*interrupting*) No, don't blame him. It was very good of you to warn me, Poffy. But the warning didn't make the slightest difference. You can see why—and so can you, Lucher. You've been in Vienna all through this. You know how changed everything is.

POFFY I know, I know, my dear Elena. We've put you in a horribly unfair position.

COUNTESS *We're* not doing that! It's not *our* fault that she's turned against her own kind.

POFFY It's only proof of her good sense.

COUNT Yes—and look at the results of her good sense! And then look at us, who wouldn't accept the inevitable.

COUNTESS It's to our everlasting credit that we didn't. (*She goes over to the COUNT, and takes his arm.*)

LUCHER (*rising laboriously*) I'm not enjoying this discussion. Come on. I must arrange

about the flowers for the party I'm getting them second hand from Gruen the undertaker Good bye, Frau Krug Step in at the hotel some time for a cup of coffee (*She goes out at the right*)

COUNTESS Good bye, Elena I doubt very much that we shall see you again (*She goes out*)

COUNT (*with attempted courtesy*) You see—we start the homeward journey to England to-morrow

ELENA Good bye, Franz

COUNT Herr Professor Doctor (*He bows and goes*)

POFFY I'm sorry, Elena—very sorry

ELENA Good bye, Poffy Come to see us again soon Perhaps my husband can do

POFFY My duties as professional guide occupy much of my time—but perhaps I'll find a brief opportunity Good bye, Herr Doctor Good bye, Elena (*He kisses her hand and goes For a few moments, ELENA stares angrily at the door through which they have gone*)

ANTON You did not appear to best advantage in that encounter

ELENA (*too heatedly*) What could I have said or done to make those imbeciles understand? They think I could sit there, and joke with them, and drink with them, as though nothing had happened

ANTON (*gently*) You said that it might be great fun

ELENA Fun! Carousing with the Countess von Stainz? And there'll be others at the party even worse than she is

ANTON When I came into this room, you were laughing with them You were just about to accept their invitation

ELENA Why did you come in here at all, if you

were so colossally busy ? Why didn't you let me get rid of them by myself ?

ANTON I came to the conclusion that you should go to that party

ELENA What ?

ANTON There seems to me no reason why you shouldn't

ELENA (*facing him*) Are you going to carry on the attack ?

ANTON Attack against what ?

ELENA Against my peace of mind !

ANTON I thought so

ELENA Oh ! I suppose you consider that it will be good for me to go there and feel wretched and out of place, merely to assure myself that I m right Do I have to go there for that ?

ANTON Are you entirely sure that you are right ?

ELENA You can stand there and ask me that ?

ANTON If you take my advice, Elena, you ll go You know, you may not be quite the calm, superior being that you fancy yourself

ELENA (*interrupting*) Are you prescribing for me, as though I were

ANTON Yes, that s exactly what I m doing The tender spot has been uncovered Now we can take measures to cure it Elena, as your family physician, as well as your husband, I order you to go to Lucher's to night, and do the inane things you used to do, and that you still secretly think were gloriously romantic

ELENA Anton—I know you ve been subjecting me to treatment ever since we were married But you ve at least been subtle about it Now your methods are a little too obvious to be effective

ANTON I've revised my methods because I

learned something myself when I saw you with your old friends You deliver all this fine talk about the old days and the new—the woman who was reborn after the revolution And now some pitiable spectres appear to you and you can't bear to face them

ELENA I can face anything, including your vast overpowering intellect

ANTON There are some things you can't face, my darling, because you can't see them You're still in a state of emotional bondage You're tied to those people by a cord that's strong even though it's invisible You must cut that cord—and here's the chance to do it

ELENA When I require your professional services I shall make an appointment and come to your office

ANTON The appointment is now ! (*They face each other through a moment of angry silence Then ELENA goes to him*)

ELENA Oh, Anton—this is so silly

ANTON No, it isn't silly (*They sit down together on the end of the couch*)

ELENA Two grown up people, shouting at each other

ANTON Sometimes we have to shout Elena—there's never been a complete understanding between us There's been a ghost in our house, an arrogant ghost, blocking the fulfilment of our life together A thousand different times when I thought that at last we'd achieved the thing that we both want, he has stepped into the room, and laughed at me (*ELENA glances involuntarily toward the door at the right*)

ELENA The bearer of that damned name !

ANTON Yes When I heard he might be there to night it was something of a shock But then I thought of the advice I had given to

other patients of mine You've seen what ten years have done to the Count and Countess von Stainz Well—see what the same years have done to him Go to that party, have a good look at him, and then come home and admit that I m right

ELENA You re always right, Anton That's your only fault

ANTON (*laughing*) Yes—I ve often worried about that (*He kisses her hair*) Now come, my dear, dress yourself up, and try to persuade your old friends that you re still one of them Sing, dance, flirt—relax ' Let yourself go completely ' And see what happens

ELENA Let myself go Is that the prescription ?

ANTON Why not ? (*OLD KRUG bustles in from the upper left*)

KRUG Well—I saw them ' I had a good look at them from the window—and a more down at the heel lot I never clapped eyes on Oh, I laughed ' I laughed when I thought of the old days when

ANTON You talk too much (*He has risen and is going toward the door to his offices*)

KRUG Then maybe I can play the wireless ?

ANTON No (*To ELENA*) Put on that white dress You know—the one you got in Paris You look lovely in that (*He goes out at the left*)

KRUG (*mystified*) He wants you to dress up What for ? Does he want you to go to the party ? (*He comes close to her*)

ELENA He's a little mixed up He has me confused with that last patient of his—the one from Pennsylvania

KRUG I don t understand what you mean, Elena Has anything gone wrong ?

ELENA No, father Not yet Why don't you play the wireless ?

KRUG Now ?

ELENA Yes, dear—I want to hear it

KRUG Ah, Elena—you're my friend ! (*He leans over her She pats his cheek, tenderly He then turns, happily, goes up to the radio, and switches it on It is playing 'The Dollar Princess Waltz'*) Listen, Elena It's the band at the Bristol They always play the old tunes, for a half-hour before supper—to give us old timers an appetite It's beautiful, isn't it ? (*He comes down, toward the right*)

ELENA No (*Nevertheless, she is swaying ever so slightly in time to the music OLD KRUG watches her, fascinated At length she rises, crosses to the door at the left, and knocks KRUG sits down at the right to await developments*)

ELENA (*calling*) Anton !

KRUG Oh, what do you want him for ? He'll only make us turn it off (*ANTON appears in the doorway*)

ANTON What is it ?

ELENA Will you please look in the safe—in my jewel box ? There's a necklace there—a diamond necklace

ANTON I'll get it (*He goes out*) (*Swaying more perceptibly, exuberantly to the rhythm of 'The Dollar Princess,' she crosses to the chair where OLD KRUG is sitting*)

KRUG You didn't mean what you said about the music, did you, Elena ? It really is beautiful, isn't it ?

ELENA Yes, father Beautiful (*She extends her arms Gleeefully, he jumps up They waltz together*)

CURTAIN

ACT II

The scene is a private room upstairs in the Hotel Lucher a stuffy edifice built in the gaslit eighties Although redolent of stale plush, which is suggestive to the Anglo Saxon mind of Victorianism and therefore of dreary propriety, this venerable tavern retains a winked intimation of Viennese caprice Its sombre salons can still sparkle with happy imaginings of frivolities which no longer are—and perhaps never were—but which eternally should be

At right, downstage, is a leather swinging door, leading to the pantries and kitchens Upstage right and left are two more doors In the centre, at the back, double doors open upon a bedroom in which is an enormous, canopied bed Downstage left, double doors open upon a larger room in which the banquet is to be held

Above the door at the back, which is two or three steps up from the level of the stage, is hung an oval portrait of the late Emperor Franz Josef I A PORTER, on a step ladder, is arranging laurel festoons about this portrait Another PORTER is holding the ladder

At the left is a gilded couch with plum-coloured brocade upholstery By it is a small gilded, marble topped tabouret At the right is a round table, also marble topped, behind which, as though enthroned, sits FRAU LUCHER, administering orders to a respectful, palpitant group which includes STRUP, the aged head waiter, and BREDZI, the band leader, who is wearing a frogged green coat and is carrying his violin He has given LUCHER the programme of selections for the evening and is awaiting her verdict on it There are also present two lesser WAITERS and two quivering BUS BOYS A BELL-BOY is posted in the doorway at the left There are other chairs against the walls and perhaps a few potted palms From the left, offstage, the small orchestra is playing a brisk march, as vigorously as its meagre equipment and talents will allow

LUCHER (*to BREDZI*) There is too much of the Mozart

BREDZI No doubt, Frau Lucher

LUCHER No doubt whatever They will want waltzes, apassionata, until they get drunk, and then they will want more waltzes Sentimental ninnies ! (*She hands the programme back to BREDZI*) They will want to weep on each other s shoulders You understand ?

BREDZI Perfectly, ma'am

LUCHER Accompaniment for sobs—that's all that's expected of you (*Her cigar has gone out A BUS-BOY hastily strikes a match for her She exhales a cloud of smoke, then turns to STRUP*) Now, Strup, I'm ready for the wines (*STRUP hands her the wine card*)

STRUP (*pridefully*) I have arranged everything

LUCHER Oh, have you ! (*She scans the wine card with a practised eye*) Champagne ! Clicquot 1911 ! You are planning to serve that rabble Clicquot 1911 ?

STRUP It s the best we have, madam

LUCHER And you re granting them the best !

STRUP It is a matter of tradition

LUCHER So ? You're putting tradition ahead of common sense, are you ?

STRUP (*fearfully*) It isn t that, Frau Lucher, I only felt that

LUCHER (*slapping the table*) The employees of this hotel will take their notions of tradition and of everything else from me ! (*She includes all of them in the same decisive glare*) You will serve Tizane with the roast—a half bottle for each of them When they've guzzled that much, nothing but beer Vienna beer, not Muenchner

STRUP Very good, ma'am

LUCHER A sage observation, Herr Strup
Now, all of you, remember this Courtesy,
deference—treat them as if they were still
lords of creation and as if you expected heavy
tips for your services, which, I promise you, you
won't get All the old formalities, the old non
sense, from all of you—until they start breaking
the furniture—then, *a firm hand* ! If you can't
manage them by yourselves, send for me

STRUP Yes, ma'am We shall, ma'am

LUCHER You will serve the apéritifs in here
That is all

STRUP Yes ma'am To your posts, *march* ! (*The
WAITERS and BUS BOYS hurry out LUCHER turns
her attention to the men at the ladder*)

LUCHER You ! You have done enough fussing
with the Emperor Get that ladder out of here
(*Hastily, they fold up the ladder and depart*) A
BELL BOY *appears in the large door at the right,
ushering in* POFFY, *now wearing a once resplendent
uniform which reeks of moth balls and naphtha*)

BOY Herr Povoromo !

STRUP (*bowing low*) Herr Baron

POFFY (*mildly astonished*) What ? Oh ! I'm
greatly obliged for the restoration of the title

[*He bows to STRUP*]

LUCHER Are they beginning to arrive ?

POFFY Yes—apéritifs are in order

STRUP Yes Herr Baron (*BREDZI and STRUP go
out at the left POFFY advances jauntily toward
LUCHER*)

POFFY I came to see you about the final
arrangements

LUCHER The final arrangements are made
(*The march music off stage stops*)

POFFY In particular reference to the wine

LUCHER (*consulting her list*) With the soup, sherry—nine schillings With the trout, Grinzinger—seven schillings With the roast, Tizane—nine schillings

POFFY (*shocked*) Tizane ' Is that the best that this superior establishment can afford ?

LUCHER On this occasion, yes

POFFY There will be complaints

LUCHER You people are not paying for this affair I am

POFFY We are aware of that condition Nevertheless—I must insist—there will be complaints

LUCHER Did that message you received say what time he would arrive ?

POFFY I expected him on the afternoon train from Salzburg But he was not on it

LUCHER (*with a look at her watch*) No It is now half after eight

POFFY There will be another train

LUCHER Yes—and he won't be on that, either It's just as I thought They've stopped him at the border Are there any unexpected arrivals ?

POFFY No Here's the complete list Only eight names instead of the expected thirty (*POFFY takes the list from his pocket*)

LUCHER Let me see it (*He hands it to her*)

[TORLINI, the hotel courier, enters from the upper left, accompanied by an officer of police

TORLINI Frau Lucher !

LUCHER Yes ?

TORLINI The police, ma'am (*LUCHER is not in the least disturbed by this announcement She is examining critically the list of guests*)

LUCHER (*to the POLICEMAN*) What do you want ?

POLICEMAN The Herr Inspector thought it might be as well for me to have a look around

LUCHER Go ahead and look You'll observe nothing of the slightest interest (*The POLICEMAN nods and looks about the room, paying special attention to the portrait of Franz Josef*)

POFFY Surely, for only eight, you could afford Moet et Chandon, at the least

LUCHER No There's not one on this list with a palate left to his name The bottles of Tizane will be wrapped in napkins No one will know the difference

POFFY (*bowing*) As you say, my dear hostess

LUCHER Exactly as I say ! (*She hands him back the list The POLICEMAN is at the large door at the left*)

POLICEMAN (*pointing off to the left*) Will the reception be held in there ?

LUCHER Yes And it will be kept in there (*The POLICEMAN steps out at the left LUCHER speaks in an undertone to POFFY*) If he had arrived it would have been different I would have served the best I d even have done it if she had consented to come But for the rest of you, Tizane is good enough

POFFY She was right, of course She'd have had a poor time

LUCHER Yes She was right But I d like to have heard what the great psychologist said to her after we left (*The POLICEMAN has returned*)

POLICEMAN Who is to be present at this function ?

POFFY Here is the list (*He hands the list to the POLICEMAN, then turns to LUCHER*) And if he can find any cause for excitement in that group, then perhaps it may be a good party, after all

POLICEMAN Is this all ?

LUCHER That is all, and as I informed the inspector—there'll be no one of the slightest importance here to-night (*Having looked over the list, the POLICEMAN sticks it in the large note-book which he carries in a breast pocket*)

POLICEMAN If you don't mind, I think I'll have a look at these guests of yours and make certain that this list is correct

LUCHER You're calling me a liar ?

POLICEMAN No I'm only being careful (*He turns to the left and starts to go out*)

POFFY Perhaps you'd like me to present them to you formally (*He and the POLICEMAN go out at the left*)

LUCHER Torlini, give that policeman a drink

TORLINI Yes, ma'am (*He goes off to the left*
FRAU LUCHER *opens her hand-bag and takes therefrom a note-book and gold pencil* She is leaning over the little marble topped table at the left, figuring out the cost of this affair The aged CHEF rushes in from the right He is in a state of terrific perturbation, as is a WAITER, who follows him)

CHEF Frau Lucher !

LUCHER (*calmly*) Weil—what is it ? (*Her back is toward the CHEF so that she does not see him bow low as the ARCHDUKE RUDOLF MAXIMILLIAN comes in from the right* RUDOLF is tall, lean, deliberately ominous, consciously mad—an ageless prince who, despite the absurd inappropriateness of the Tyrolean costume that he now wears, brings back with him into the Hotel Lucher the semblance of imperial splendour which it had known when such outrageous beings as he were lords of Vienna He is followed by a WAITER and two BUS-BOYS, who carry his cape, haversack, blanket roll and sword holster Even these BUS-BOYS, who were infants when the House of Habsburg fell—even they are awe struck, trepidant in

the presence of a magnificence which they have been rigorously taught to scorn RUDOLF crosses to LUCHER and administers a loving whack to her ample bottom)

RUDOLF Good evening, venerable strumpet (LUCHER turns, stares at him, mutters some blasphemous exclamation of dismay, curtseys involuntarily, then rushes to the doors at the left and shuts them RUDOLF follows her) Still wearing the red flannel drawers ? (He lifts her skirts from behind) Thank God, there's something in Vienna that hasn't been changed

LUCHER (*ferociously*) How did you come here ?

RUDOLF I came by various means of conveyance which I shall not describe in detail My entrance to the hotel was made through the kitchens—and whatever appetite I may have had is now gone You received no letter from me ?

LUCHER No

RUDOLF Good ! I wrote none (*He strolls toward the right, pauses, and sniffs*) There's the same nauseating stench of fish in this hotel By God—I believe it's the same fish !

LUCHER Do *they* know ?

RUDOLF Who are they ?

LUCHER Poffy—Count von Stainz—Hoetzler

RUDOLF Is it necessary for me to advise *them* of my intentions ? Is it ?

LUCHER They will be startled

RUDOLF As they should be ! I will occupy the Imperial Suite

LUCHER The Imperial Suite no longer exists

RUDOLF Restore it !

LUCHER (*to the BUS BOYS*) Is that his luggage ?

BUS BOYS (*eagerly*) Yes, Frau Lucher We were commanded to

CHEF Yes, Frau Lucher His Imperial Highness ordered that we take it to

LUCHER Put it in there (*She indicates the door at the back The CHEF motions to the two BOYS, who hustle out as directed The WAITER goes with them*) Do you happen to know that the police are in the building ?

RUDOLF *You !* Were you addressing the chef ?

LUCHER (*grudgingly*) Your Imperial Highness (*To the CHEF*) You may go (*The CHEF starts to go out at the right*)

RUDOLF Wait ! (*The CHEF stops, and bows*) You recognised me, didn't you ?

CHEF (*pleased*) Yes, Your Serene Highness (*He bows again*)

RUDOLF You did *not* recognise me I am travelling incognito

CHEF (*bowing*) Yes, Your Serene Highness (*He goes out at the right*)

LUCHER If your memory were better, you would remember that *this* was the Imperial Suite

RUDOLF (*looking about the room*) By God, it is ! (*He sees the portrait of Franz Josef, salutes it, then sits in the chair back of the table at the right and starts to take off his shoes The WAITER comes out of the room at the back followed by the BUS-BOYS*) I want some brandy

LUCHER Brandy

WAITER (*bowing*) At once, Your Serene Highness (*He goes RUDOLF is shaking some pebbles from one of his shoes into an ash tray on the table*)

RUDOLF A cigarette

LUCHER Cigarette ! (*One of the BUS-BOYS places a cigarette between RUDOLF's "full rich lips" The other boy lights it*)

BUS-BOYS (*bowing together*) Your Serene Highness (*They scurry out at the right* RUDOLF *exhales a huge cloud of smoke Then he laughs*)

RUDOLF It's incredible ! I believe that even the aged worms in your woodwork recognise me, and are thrilled by my return I don't blame them—after all these years with nothing to do but sit back and watch themselves decay How have you managed to keep this decrepit establishment going ?

LUCHER We have plenty of trade (*The WAITER comes in with a tray on which is a bottle of brandy and one enormous glass, which he puts on the table*)

RUDOLF Loud-mouthed American tourists, I suppose

LUCHER Yes ! They flock here to ogle the scenes of your triumphs (*She is pouring a drink of brandy*)

RUDOLF Disgusting !

LUCHER (*to the WAITER*) Tell Torlini I want to see him

WAITER Yes, Frau Lucher (*The WAITER goes out at the left*)

RUDOLF I find the whole aspect of this place depressing, and at the same time rather gratifying

LUCHER (*interrupting him*) Now, I wasn't joking when I warned you about the police

RUDOLF (*through her speech*) Will you please not talk when I'm speaking ? Sit down ! (*Under protest LUCHER has stopped talking and sits down across the table from him*) Does this city realise

that it's hopelessly defunct ? It is like a corpse that twitches with the reflexes of life—a gruesome spectacle I don't envy you, Lucher, having to abide here among the remains I didn't really mean that I do envy you (*He gulps some brandy*) They drained the blood from Vienna when they removed us—and now observe the results ! Serves the swine right (*Another gulp*)

LUCHER Do you wish to change your clothes ?

RUDOLF Naturally, I don't intend to exhibit myself in this outlandish costume

LUCHER (*rising*) Then you had better go in there, and *stay* in there, till I can get rid of the police

RUDOLF Sit down ! (*Subduing several choice oaths, she again sits*) Who is here, besides Poffy and that senile incompetent, General Hoetzler ?

LUCHER The Baroness von Krett, and Koepcke and his wife, and Talisz

RUDOLF And Elena Vervesz She is here, too

LUCHER No

RUDOLF She is late

LUCHER She is not coming !

RUDOLF What ? She is not in Vienna ?

LUCHER Yes—but she has flatly refused to come !

RUDOLF Oh ! She didn't know I would be here Married, isn't she ?

LUCHER Yes To a doctor—a very important doctor

RUDOLF I have a distinct feeling that he will be called out to-night, to some distant place—an emergency case Have you seen her lately ?

LUCHER I went to her house to-day (*The*

orchestra starts off stage, playing the opening bars of "The Blue Danube")

RUDOLF How is she ? Old ?

LUCHER No (*Reminded by the music that the door is open, she rises and starts over toward the left*)

RUDOLF Does she bulge ? (*LUCHER does not answer He roars*) Does she BULGE ? (*LUCHER turns to him*) Here ? (*He indicates breasts*)

LUCHER No ! (*She shuts the doors at the left, so that the music can now be heard only faintly*)

RUDOLF Send for her

LUCHER She will not come

RUDOLF Tell her that her one true lover has condescended to be present

LUCHER I tell you, *she will not come* !

RUDOLF (*rising suddenly*) And I am telling you that she *will* come !

LUCHER She has a different life now

RUDOLF (*advancing*) If by any chance she should not be here when I am ready (*He takes hold of her throat*) But you know the consequences—don't you, old filthy ? You know ! (*He laughs, gives her a playful shake, and kisses her*)

LUCHER (*through his kisses*) There is something else in Vienna that is not changed You ! You are the same maniac—like all your wretched family (*RUDOLF laughs, releases her, and walks over to the table at the right*)

RUDOLF No—not a maniac It is only that I am constantly intoxicated with my own charm (*He starts to yodel He picks up the bottle and glass, also his green Tyrolean hat*) I want a valet (*He puts on his hat and crosses to LUCHER*) Tell Elena to take all the time she wants I don't approve of women who jump into their clothes like fire horses She must make every possible effort to

look alluring (*He pinches her and strolls off yodelling into the bedroom at the back He starts to remove his clothes* LUCHER nervously rushes up with unusual alacrity and closes the doors after him Then she crosses to the doors at the left, opens them, and calls)

LUCHER Strup ! (*The music is playing loudly*)
Strup !

STRUP (*from off stage*) Yes, Frau Lucher (*He hurries in*)

LUCHER (*in measured tones*) You will take the Tizane off the ice We will serve champagne—
Clicquot 1911

STRUP What ?

LUCHER Did you hear ?

STRUP (*astounded*) The Clicquot 1911 (LUCHER crosses slowly to the table at the right)

LUCHER Yes, and there will be nine covers, instead of eight Have them get that big chair that's in the office—that gold chair (*TORLINI has appeared in the doorway, followed by the POLICEMAN, whom LUCHER does not at first see*)

STRUP Yes, ma am Nine covers (*Hearing this, the POLICEMAN takes out his note book and the list of guests which POFFY had given him*)

LUCHER Put the gold chair at the head of the table And I want caviar served

TORLINI You sent for me, Frau Lucher ?

LUCHER Yes, I did (*She sees the POLICEMAN*)
But it's

POLICEMAN Nine covers ? There are only eight here

LUCHER I neglected to count myself I am to attend the party

POLICEMAN The gold chair will be for you ?

LUCHER Why not ? It's my hotel, isn't it ? Go

on, Strup, do as you're told (*STRUP goes out at the left* LUCHER *goes close to TORLINI*)

LUCHER I want to send a message—(*the POLICEMAN is evincing interest* LUCHER *is frantically attempting to signal to TORLINI to get rid of the POLICEMAN*)—to the florists The flowers they sent are all wilted (*The POLICEMAN is watching too closely*—LUCHER *goes over to him, fire in her eyes*) And as for you—I'd be grateful if you'd go straight to the Herr Inspector and tell him that I consider this intrusion by the police an unpardonable outrage! Do you hear that?

POLICEMAN Yes—Frau Lucher I hear But surely you'll agree that the police must be

LUCHER (*shouting*) I'll agree to nothing! I've taken great pains to explain this whole affair to the authorities and they assured me that there would be no interference

POLICEMAN I only know that I have been ordered to look in here, and

LUCHER And you've obeyed your orders (*She opens her hand bag*) You've seen everything and satisfied yourself that nothing harmful can come of this It's all ridiculous stupidity typical of the brainless asses who govern this city (*She has fished some bills from her hand bag*) Here, my good man (*She hands the money to him*) Now run along to the inspector, and present to him my sincerest compliments (*She pushes him toward the door*)

POLICEMAN I will, Frau Lucher! (*He pockets the money*) And if he sends me back, it won't be my fault

LUCHER I know that Go on (*She pushes him out, then addresses TORLINI, rapidly, in a furious undertone*) See that that policeman gets out of the hotel Then telephone to Dr Anton Krug's house, and tell Frau Krug that the worst has happened!

TORLINI The worst ?

LUCHER She'll understand Tell her to get into a car and drive out of Vienna just as fast as she can

TORLINI Yes, Frau Lucher But what about the florist ?

LUCHER (*at the top of her lungs*) Great God ! Never mind the florist ! (*The door at the back opens, and RUDOLF appears wearing his shirt and nothing else*)

RUDOLF Where in hell is that valet ?

LUCHER Get back in that room !

TORLINI (*staring at RUDOLF*) It is impossible !

LUCHER I told you to stay in

RUDOLF Is there such a thing as a valet in this brothel ?

LUCHER Yes, he's coming right up

RUDOLF Thank you, my sweet (*He pinches her cheek*)

TORLINI (*bowing low*) Your Imperial Highness (*RUDOLF reaches out and lifts TORLINI'S bowed head*)

RUDOLF I do not remember who you are—nevertheless, good evening (*He bows to TORLINI, then turns and walks back with great dignity, albeit without trousers, into his room LUCHER slams the door behind him*)

LUCHER Now do you know what I meant by the worst ?

TORLINI (*trembling*) I do

LUCHER Tell her he's here When he finds out she isn't in this hotel, there'll be an uproar He'll go after her He'll break into her house, and have a fight with her husband If she wants to avoid a nasty scene, she'll have to get herself

out of the city, at once (*The COUNT has come in from the left He is carrying a cocktail glass TORLINI goes*)

COUNT Now let me tell you something, Frau Lucher I just happened to take a look under the napkin in one of the ice buckets, and what did I see there? Tizane—that's what I saw! Tizane—sparkling dishwater! (*LUCHER has been gathering up the papers from the table and stuffing them back into her hand bag She darts one look at the COUNT*)

LUCHER You're drunk already

COUNT Oh, now, that isn't worthy of you, Lucher It hasn't been easy for us to come here, you know If you had the heart to invite us here, I should think you'd have the decency to furnish us with wine that is at least potable (*LUCHER, however, has gone out at the right GISELLA VON KRETT has come in from the left She was once one of the haughtier beauties of the court She is now a wasted, embittered governess, clinging grimly to the sense of snobbery which is all that she managed to salvage from the wreckage of the past She is wearing an evening gown which was fashionable in 1917*)

GISELLA Well? Did you tell her we insisted on champagne?

COUNT Yes, but she didn't seem to hear me (*GISELLA sits down at the left*)

GISELLA We should have known that this would happen She dragged us here solely to humiliate us for the satisfaction of her own vulgarian sense of inferiority

COUNT Ah, well, my dear Gisella—Tizane isn't really so unbearable I mean to say, after the first three glasses you hardly know what you're drinking I shall consume the first three glasses rapidly

HOETZLER (*from off stage*) I hurled in the 19th army corps—or was it the 17th? (*He enters from the left with SOPHIA KOEPPKE on his arm*) And in another twelve hours we d have smashed the Russian line (*He sees the COUNT*) Franz!

COUNT General Hoetzler! (*They bow formally and shake hands*) The old GENERAL is still fat but obviously shrunk, he hasn't flesh enough left to fill his skin. He wears a uniform coat, which is too large for him by many years, but moths have deprived him of the trousers that go with it and he is forced to wear a pair from his grey civilian suit. In spite of which, he is wilfully hearty, and determined to make this a gay and care free celebration. SOPHIA is a faded blonde, buxom and—unlike the others—too well fed, but still flagrantly girlish.)

HOETZLER This is splendid, old boy

SOPHIA (*who has gone over to GISELLA*) My darling Gisella! How stunning you look!

GISELLA (*without emotion*) Good evening, Sophia

HOETZLER Gisella! Smart, distinguished, entrancing as ever!

SOPHIA Now you must all be quiet, because dear General Hoetzler is telling me the most thrilling story about the campaign in 1915

COUNT Oh, yes, indeed—I remember it well. You had the Russians in a tight corner—eh, General? Now do sit down, Sophia (*She sits down at the right*) Offended at this abrupt dismissal of his favourite reminiscence, the GENERAL makes an attempt to continue.)

HOETZLER I was trying to explain to Sophia how curious it was that, at the very moment of complete triumph (*But the COUNT has his back turned*)

COUNT (*to SOPHIA*) I can't tell you what a

delightful privilege it is to see a really stylish woman again

SOPHIA (*giggling shrilly*) Oh Franz—you're much too gallant

COUNT With provocation, my dear

SOPHIA But Koeppke and I do try to keep up appearances, even in the hopelessly middle class atmosphere of Switzerland

COUNT As Tatti and I do, in Upper Tooting
But it's an endless struggle

SOPHIA Dreadful! People don't seem to understand the importance of those things any more
There are so many false standards

COUNT That's it! That's precisely it! (*During all this, HOETZLER has sat down on the couch beside GISELLA, and is carrying on manfully with his narrative*)

HOETZLER I was just telling Sophia of the time early in 1915 when we had the Russians on the run. We were within *that* of breaking through the enemy's line, and they had no more than a corporal's guard in reserve. You can readily imagine the consequences. We'd have marched on to Petersburg, crushed the Russian Empire! But at the very moment when my plan of campaign had reached a climax (*By this time the COUNT has said 'That's precisely it!' and has been compelled, by the loudness of HOETZLER'S voice, to turn to listen*) I received a telegram from Prince Max in Berlin telling me to withdraw! Now I ask you, I ask all of you, what was I to do?

COUNT Withdraw

HOETZLER Exactly. And the baffling part of it all is that that telegram from Berlin has never been adequately explained. And I can tell you, my dear Gisella

COUNTESS (*from off stage*) They're all in here
(*The COUNTESS and TALISZ come in, arm in arm*
She is now wearing an evening dress, of her own
manufacture, and there is an ostrich plume or so in her
hair TALISZ *is very old, somewhat bemused and*
slightly deaf He is wearing a frayed swallow-tail
coat, lustreless black satin knee breeches, and black
cotton stockings borrowed from his landlady
There are general greetings, all very formal, very
courtly)

COUNTESS Gisella ! Sophia ! Well !

SOPHIA Well !

GISELLA (*acidly*) The General is telling us about
a telegram from Berlin

HOETZLER I was merely explaining that there
was a certain faction in Prussia headed by
Hindenburg that did not wish Austria to
achieve

TALISZ (*to SOPHIA*) And where is Koepcke ? I
don't see him Isn't he to be with us ? (*The*
COUNTESS takes his arm and indicates that he has
interrupted the GENERAL)

HOETZLER (*giving TALISZ an angry look*) There
can be no question of doubt that Hindenburg
was jealous of the inevitable result of my coup
He knew my victory would destroy the Russian
power and Austria would gain the credit for
having won the war

TALISZ (*who doesn't quite know what's happening*)
Is His Imperial Highness here yet ?

SOPHIA No Poffy's out now trying to find out
if there's any word of him

TALISZ I beg your pardon ?

COUNTESS (*distinctly, in his ear*) She said
" Poffy's out now trying to find out if there's any
word of him "

TALISZ Oh, yes, I knew that I felt sure he'd come

HOETZLER Hindenburg, of course, was a Prussian of the Prussians—contemptuous of Austria, determined to

TALISZ What's the General saying ?

COUNTESS Something about the war

TALISZ Oh ! Too bad (*He moves away*
Nettled by the frequent interruptions, HOETZLER makes
a supreme attempt to complete his story)

HOETZLER I knew it at the time, but my obligations as a soldier to our allies compelled me to silence Hindenburg blocked my plans and then deliberately stole them ! Stole them—and used them himself in the Masurian Lakes region ! That, my friends, is the true explanation of (POFFY enters *The COUNT, COUNTESS and SOPHIA rush over to question him*)

SOPHIA Poffy, is there any news ?

COUNT What about Rudolf ? Is he coming ?

POFFY No The last train from Salzburg is in, but he wasn't on it

COUNTESS Oh ! I can't bear to think they've caught him (*She is apparently on the verge of tears, her favourite perch*)

SOPHIA He must come He must !

POFFY Of course with Rudolf there is always hope

HOETZLER Of course there is hope Rudolf was always late Do you remember the time, my dear Gisella, when the Emperor was holding a reception for King Edward VII ?

GISELLA No (*STRUP has come in, followed by two WAITERS with trays loaded with glasses of tepid vermouth*)

STRUP (*speaking through HOETZLER's lines*) Herr Baron, the apéritifs !

POFFY By all means proceed with them

STRUP Thank you, Herr Baron (*The service of the apéritifs proceeds, under STRUP's benign supervision, while HOETZLER continues with his reminiscence about the reception for King Edward VII*)

HOETZLER (*taking GISELLA's "No" as cue*) Matters of the utmost importance were at stake, and the Emperor had commanded all the members of the royal family to be most punctual. And of course they all were—with one exception (*The WAITER offers HOETZLER a drink which he takes and then continues*) With one exception—Rudolf. He was a mere stripling then, but even so, he kept the King of England waiting for two hours while he (*The VALET has come in from the right and gone up to the bedroom door. He knocks*)

RUDOLF (*from within*) Come in

HOETZLER Who's in that room ?

SOPHIA (*archly*) Now—now, General !

HOETZLER But if there's anybody spying on us

POFFY He'll be bitterly disappointed. Now if you will all be good enough to rise (*They all rise. POFFY turns and lifts his glass to the portrait of Franz Josef*) To His Imperial Majesty ! (*They all drink and then give silent, facial testimony to the low quality of the vermouth. The oppressive silence is broken by the entrance from the left of KOEPPKE, a brisk, obtrusive little man who, like his wife, SOPHIA, is too well nourished*)

KOEPPKE (*breezily*) Well, here I am !

SOPHIA You're late

KOEPPKE Yes, my love (*He looks about*) Is the party in full swing?

GISELLA It is

POFFY Oh, come—let's go in to dinner

GISELLA I've lost my appetite That loathsome vermouth

POFFY I know, my dear Gisella, you're accustomed to the best in Palermo As for the rest of us we have come here to conduct a celebration It is going to be a difficult task, but I strongly urge that we all smother our justifiable grievances and pretend to be having a very devil of an uproarious carousal Let us close our eyes to the fact that we all look a bit moth-eaten and concentrate on getting through this with a show of good grace (*The COUNT starts to sing 'Vilya oh, Vilya, the witch of the wood'*)

GISELLA We're not going to be very uproarious on Tizane

HOETZLER I beg of you, Gisella, be quiet

SOPHIA (*referring to the COUNT's song*) That's a cheerful selection!

GISELLA (*to POFFY*) If you'd only taken the trouble to let us know what it would be like

COUNTESS It wasn't Poffy's fault

KOEPPKE Personally I'm in favour of abandoning the whole thing (*The COUNTESS has started to weep SOPHIA is trying to calm her The COUNT is slumped in a chair at the left, still singing 'Vilya'* *GISELLA is seated at the right, regarding the COUNTESS with disgust HOETZLER and TALISZ are behind her POFFY has gone out at the left to beg the musicians for God's sake to play something lively KOEPPKE is hovering over the couch, patronising the COUNTESS The following speeches are delivered in a jumble*)

SOPHIA I wish to heaven you'd all listen to Poffy At least we can pretend to be gay and—and jolly Now, please, Tatti, you won't help matters at all by crying your eyes out

HOETZLER Perhaps if Lucher would give us some really good beer it might take effect more quickly

TALISZ (*to HOETZLER*) What's everybody saying now ?

Together

KOEPPKE (*to the COUNTESS and SOPHIA*) I'll tell you what How about the three of us slipping down to the bar and having a few brandies ? Just the three of us Oh, don't worry—I can pay for them I've over a hundred and fifty real marks in my pocket at this moment ! (*ELENA has entered on the cue from TALISZ What's everybody saying now ? " She comes down from the upper right, so that TALISZ and HOETZLER see her first*)

ELENA Talisz ! I did so hope you'd be here And the dear General How sweet it is to see you

TALISZ Elena ! Elena ! (*He kisses her hand*)

HOETZLER Elena, is it you ? (*POFFY has come back, he sees ELENA, and fairly whoops for joy*)

POFFY Elena ! (*The others are now aware of her presence They cease their chattering, weeping and singing, and form a hilarious, welcoming group about her*)

ELENA Tatti ! You should have known I couldn't keep away And Sophia ! How charming you look ! And Koepcke ! I can't believe it ! Hello, Franz—you knew I'd be here, didn't you !

COUNT A good joke on us ! A capital joke ! Just like you, Elena Bring some more drinks Herr Ober ! Herr Ober ! (*The COUNT rushes out at the left*)

HOETZLER Where's that blackguard gone with the apéritifs ?

ELENA And here's Gisella How are you, my darling ? You re looking so *chic*, so exactly like yourself

GISELLA They told me you weren t coming

COUNTESS She wanted to surprise us—to make it all the better

KOEPPKE And that s what she's done

ELENA I changed my mind for no reason except a selfish one I wanted to see all of you—and hear you laugh and joke (*A veritable orgy of ad libbing is interrupted when the COUNT appears in the doorway at the left*)

COUNT (*shouting*) Come in to dinner ! They're serving champagne !

SOPHIA What ?

COUNT Clicquot 1911 ! And caviar ! (*The COUNT's announcement is greeted with cheers POFKY's request for lively music has been fulfilled by the orchestra off stage There is a general movement toward the left*)

HOETZLER (*offering ELENA his arm*) With your permission, I think I take the precedence (*ELENA takes the GENERAL'S arm and goes out at the left, followed by KOEPPKE and the COUNTESS, POFKY and GISELLA, TALISZ and SOPHIA Just as ELENA reaches the door, LUCHER enters from the right and rushes across after them shouting*)

LUCHER Frau Krug ! Frau Krug ! Did you get my message ? (*Her voice is lost in the din of laughter, talk and music* ELENA goes out

LUCHER is going after her, but she stops when cries for " Help ! " are heard from the bedroom at the

back The bedroom door flies open and the VALET hurtles out, propelled by RUDOLF, who is now magnificent in his uniform LUCHER hastily shuts the doors at the left)

VALET Frau Lucher ! He threatened to strangle me !

RUDOLF Do you mean to tell me that that stable boy is dignified with the title of valet ?

VALET (*terrified*) I was only trying to brush Your Highness's hair

RUDOLF He scratched my ear (*RUDOLF slaps the VALET, who rushes out at the right RUDOLF starts to fasten on his golden sash*)

LUCHER You're to stay in that room until I tell you it's safe to

RUDOLF Is she here ? (*TORLINI comes in from the upper left*)

LUCHER (*to RUDOLF*) I told you she wouldn't come !

TORLINI They informed me that she had already left her house, on the way here

RUDOLF (*turning, to LUCHER*) Ah ! Then she has arrived ?

LUCHER I've warned you that the police are on the watch

RUDOLF She's here, isn't she ?

LUCHER No ! (*He tweaks her nose*) Yes !

RUDOLF Good ! You have acted with unexpected competence Bring her to me

LUCHER But they have just sat down to supper You should join them

RUDOLF Bring her here ! And champagne with her I shall not be hungry for another forty three minutes (*He crosses to the right to examine himself in the mirror*)

LUCHER (*to TORLINI*) Request Frau Krug to come here for a moment (*TORLINI goes out at the left*)

RUDOLF Frau Krug?

LUCHER That is her name! (*RUDOLF turns again to the mirror, with an expression of disgust*) You d better be careful how you talk to her

RUDOLF You may now depart, Lucher

LUCHER She isn't the same one you used to make free with Her husband is a very fine man—a big man, too, and (*RUDOLF steps up on a chair, the better to see the reflection of his sash in the mirror*)

RUDOLF I shall want some champagne—and also more cognac

LUCHER I tell you—you d better not try any of your old tricks on her She's different (*The doors at the left are opened ELENA appears, looking backward*)

COUNTESS (*from off stage*) But, my little angel, you're not going?

ELENA No, no, Tatti, don't you worry, I'll be right back

COUNT Immediately—

ELENA Yes, immediately (*She turns and sees RUDOLF on the chair, his back to her*)

RUDOLF And one other thing the towels in my bathroom are soggy Have them changed

Get out, Lucher! (*LUCHER darts one glance of commiseration at ELENA, folds her hands over her protuberant stomach, and goes out at the right ELENA stares at RUDOLF'S back He gazes at her image in the mirror After a few moments, he steps down from the chair, turns and confronts her*

The doors at the left have been closed, but the strains of a waltz are faintly audible RUDOLF starts to ward her, pauses, then walks around her ELENA does

not move, but her eyes follow him *He is behind her* *He reaches out to touch her, but doesn't touch her* *He walks around, in front of her, stares at her, then slaps her face* *He seizes her in his arms and kisses her, fiercely* A WAITER has come from the right with a bottle of cognac and glasses, followed by a BUS BOY with an ice bucket containing a bottle of champagne They deposit these at the right, gaping at RUDOLF and ELENA as they do so)

How long has it been since you were kissed like that ? Ten years ? More than ten years ! Think of it ! (*The WAITER makes a slight clatter as he arranges the glasses on the table*

RUDOLF, still holding ELENA tightly, motions behind his back to the WAITER to get out *He does so, followed by the BUS BOY* RUDOLF kisses ELENA more gently) Come—we'll have a drink ! (*He steps aside, motions her to the table* *She crosses slowly and sits down* *He goes behind the table and fills each of the glasses with equal quantities of brandy and champagne*)

ELENA You know—I realise now how completely I had forgotten you

RUDOLF Yes—it's too bad We're not equipped with the power to recall sensations One of our Creator's more serious mistakes However—to-night we will both refresh our memories (*He raises his glass, toasting her, then drains it* *She raises her glass, slightly, then places it on the table, untouched*) That's a very graceful tribute, Elena I'm referring to the necklace But—good God ! That wedding ring ! (*He laughs boisterously and seizes her hand for closer inspection of the ring*)

ELENA That's nothing to laugh at (*She is trying to pull her hand away, but he has a tight grip on her wrist*)

RUDOLF Of all the bourgeois adornments ! On you, it is a gross anachronism Like a brassière on the Venus de Milo It offends me

We must remove it (*He snatches the ring from her finger*)

ELENA Give it *back* to me !

RUDOLF I told you it offends me

ELENA (*struggling*) Are you going to give me back my ring ?

RUDOLF Yes, my darling—I ll give it back, cheerfully in the morning But in the meantime—well—surely, you can understand my point That heavy gold band on your finger would strike a discordant note

ELENA I m not planning to be in communication with you to morrow morning I want it *now* ! (*She snatches for it*)

RUDOLF (*pocketing the ring*) I must ask you to be careful, Elena Refrain from irritating me You will recall that the members of my mother s family are subject to epileptic rages—sheer exuberance, you know—which invariably result in one form or another of physical violence I should not care to send you back to your husband with your lovely nose broken, and minus one or two conspicuous teeth

ELENA (*staring at him*) It can t be true !

RUDOLF On the contrary, I can assure you that one more allusion to that detestable ring will prove that it *is* true

ELENA I wasn t thinking about that I was thinking of what ten years have failed to do to you

RUDOLF I chose to remain as I was

ELENA Ten years of exile, and humiliation, and poverty, haven t shaken in you the conviction that Franz Josef is still reigning in Schonbrunn

RUDOLF No—I admit that I have occasional qualms There are moments when I suspect that the Habsburgs are not what they once were But

when I see you, my eternally beloved, and realise that you have had the pride to preserve your figure against the day of my return—then I know that there has been no revolution (*He has sat down on the table, and is leaning over her, his face increasingly close to hers*)

ELENA Don't come near me

RUDOLF You don't wish to be kissed?

ELENA I do not!

RUDOLF Very well—if you feel that you need the inspiration of a little more champagne, you shall have it (*He goes to pour out another glass for her, but finds that she has had none. He empties her glass into the ice bucket, and refills it. He then hands it to her. She places it on the table. He pours out more for himself.*)

ELENA (*rising*) We must go in there and join the others

RUDOLF (*pouring*) We must do nothing of the kind

ELENA I came here to-night to be with them

RUDOLF Whereas I came here to be with you. Those pitiful relics are of no interest whatever to me. Come now—drink!

ELENA I'm going in there (*He steps in front of her*)

RUDOLF No, you're not

ELENA Get out of my way (*He laughs and gulps some more champagne, but does not budge. She softens her tone to one of persuasion.*) Oh, Rudolf—I'll tell them you're here. It's all that's needed to send the poor things into a complete state of delirium. Think of the excitement when they see you looking as young as ever, and as handsome, in your lovely uniform, with all the medals. Think how pleased *he'd* be (*pointing to the portrait*) if he

knew that a Habsburg was again holding court in Vienna

RUDOLF (*with a glance at the portrait*) Very well—I'll show myself to them—for his sake (*He kisses her lightly on the forehead, then crosses to the left and tries the door. It is locked. He turns to ELENA, delighted*) Lucher's had us locked in—the tactful old bawd (*He pounds on the door. It is opened. The guests at the banquet off stage are making a great deal of noise, indicative of well bred hilarity. The voice of STRUP is heard to call out. His Imperial Highness!*) RUDOLF stands in the doorway. The shouts and murmurs stop as each of the guests sees him. BREDZI's little orchestra strikes up the old national anthem. RUDOLF turns and glances at ELENA. She points to the portrait of the late Emperor, and he goes up and takes a position beneath it. POFFY comes in and bows low. The others follow him, the ladies going up to him to kiss his hand. RUDOLF greets each of them by name. He is impassive, regal, mildly disdainful—just as they want him to be. The COUNTESS begins to sob.)

That is enough—enough! (*He waves them out*) I may join you later in the evening (*They all back out. From off stage, the COUNT is heard to shout: "To His Imperial Highness."* ELENA lifts her untouched glass of champagne and sips. There are sounds of shattered glasses from the left. The doors are closed, subduing the uproar of cheers.)

Why are they all so old? (*He gazes toward the left, despondently, then suddenly decides to give this depressing matter not another thought. He turns to ELENA.*) Well? Have I or have I not done my duty? (*He comes down to the table.*) Sit down, if you please (*She sits down at the right of the table. He leans over and kisses her hair.*) Now! I suggest that we discuss briefly your husband, before we pass on to more mutually agreeable subjects. Do you love him?

ELENA Very much

RUDOLF I have no objection to that He's
a doctor, isn't he ?

ELENA A psycho-analyst

RUDOLF Ah ! A practitioner of Vienna's sole
remaining industry I've been told he's
quite brilliant. Written a book, hasn't he ?

ELENA Yes—eight volumes

RUDOLF I must meet him and let him study
me. He could derive enough material for eight
volumes more

ELENA He knows all about you already

RUDOLF Ah—you've told him !

ELENA Yes. You'll find your type analysed in
one of his books under the heading, ' Elephan-
tiasis of the Ego '

RUDOLF I doubt that I'd be interested (*He sits
down at the left of the table*) Have you any
children ?

ELENA No

RUDOLF I extend my condolences (*He lifts his
glass as in a toast. She bows slightly in acknowleg-
ment*) These purely intellectual husbands are
not very productive, are they ?

ELENA It isn't his fault that there are no
children. It's my fault Are there any more
questions ?

RUDOLF Let me see No—I think there
aren't. We can dismiss the dreary topic of your
domestic life—and press on to consideration of
my own. But I suppose you know all about it

ELENA No, Rudolf. I have not followed your
later career very closely

RUDOLF No ?

ELENA No. How have you supported yourself ?

RUDOLF In various ways. Now and then a good

run at baccarat One or two engagements in the cinema studios—did you see me in “The Shattered Idol” ?

ELENA No, I missed that, deliberately

RUDOLF You did well As it turned out, I was virtually invisible Then I conceived a great scheme for mulcting American tourists, but the authorities got wind of it, and took over the idea themselves There have been other occupations

ELENA Someone told me you’ve been running a taxi

RUDOLF Merely an amusing whim I’ve only driven people I know

ELENA And if you don’t know them when you start the drive, you do before it’s finished

RUDOLF (*laughing*) You’ve evidently been listening to gossip

ELENA Yes I’ve heard how charming you are to your fares You must have collected many delightful friends that way

RUDOLF (*wistfully*) Friends ? You can hardly call them that

ELENA No—I suppose not

RUDOLF As a matter of fact, Elena, Nice is a bore I have been very lonely

ELENA I’ve been waiting for you to say that

RUDOLF You have no sympathy for me ?

ELENA No

RUDOLF Your heart wasn’t always cold

ELENA You have never been lonely—never deserved one atom of sympathy from anyone

RUDOLF You don’t understand me No one has ever understood me It’s because I’m inscrutable

ELENA Perhaps But I remain unimpressed by your appeal for pity

RUDOLF *Pity* ! Have you the effrontery to suggest that I want you to pity me ?

ELENA Yes !

RUDOLF I see Then I shall abandon that tack (*He laughs*) Elena—it has always seemed miraculous to me that anyone could be as intelligent as you are and still alluring And you *are* alluring !

ELENA (*bowing*) You're overwhelmingly kind

RUDOLF Oh—that wasn't intended as a tribute to you It s a tribute to my own flawless taste

ELENA Ah ! I see

RUDOLF I'm proud to think that it was I who first realised you, for the sight of you now assures me that, by God, I was right You're so beautiful, Elena So *beautiful* ! You delight me ! You refresh me—and I am speaking nothing less than the truth when I tell you that refreshment is what I most urgently need

ELENA What tack are you off on now ?

RUDOLF None I am driving straight to the point My room is in there

ELENA How convenient !

RUDOLF Yes It's a room that we have occupied before

ELENA I suppose we've occupied all of them

RUDOLF We have, indeed, my darling We have made history in this hotel Come—let us make some more

ELENA (*pause*) Rudolf

RUDOLF Yes ?

ELENA I think it's time for me to announce that I'm not going to bed with you

RUDOLF (*after a while*) Very well (*He stands up, as though accepting her rejection, and walks away Drink in hand, he turns and looks at her*) I can wait (*he sips the drink*) a few minutes (*He looks toward the left*) Who's playing in there?

ELENA Bredzi

RUDOLF (*pleased*) Bredzi! (*He goes to the left and calls Bredzi! Bredzi!* The doors are opened and BREDZI comes in, with his violin He is in a fever of excitement, and knows precisely what is expected of him Following him is JANSEI, an accordion player, similarly thrilled by this summons) A waltz! (*With appropriate flourishes, they start to play Viennese Beauties* RUDOLF turns and crosses to the table where ELENA is sitting The musicians follow him, playing as they go RUDOLF bows before ELENA Laughing, she rises and curtseys, and then they start to waltz around the room The tempo is sprightly, exuberant RUDOLF manages to manœuvre ELENA to the bedroom door He kicks it open and they waltz into the room and disappear The musicians whisper to each other happily—for this is just as it should be However, after a moment, ELENA comes out alone, laughing RUDOLF follows She sits on the couch) You know—I'm being admirably patient with you

ELENA (*still laughing*) Yes, Rudolf—I know

RUDOLF Because I understand you, too well I can read your thoughts

ELENA No!

RUDOLF I can see that as a result of your purely spiritual marriage you have developed a certain reluctance, which it is for me to overcome Very well! I accept the challenge confidently! (*He has a drink of champagne, then turns to BREDZI*) Play something more—

more (BREDZI understands, and obliges with a palpitantly passionate selection For a moment, RUDOLF stands, silently regarding ELENA) Does that remind you of anything ?

ELENA Yes

RUDOLF What ?

ELENA Ischl ! (RUDOLF crosses to the couch and lies down beside her Knowing all the moves in this game, BREDZI goes close to ELENA and plays softly, persuasively)

RUDOLF Ischl ! Do you remember one night when it was too warm to stay indoors ?

ELENA Yes, we went out into the forest, and you took along an entire symphony orchestra to accompany us

RUDOLF I always adored music

ELENA And you had all the musicians blindfolded The poor things They couldn't play in harmony because they couldn't see

RUDOLF It was dreadful !

ELENA And you cursed the leader horribly—and beat him with your cane

RUDOLF And when you tried to stop me, I knocked you down

ELENA Then you dismissed the orchestra—and we went on with our romance

RUDOLF Ah, God, what beautiful times !
(ELENA is now lying back on the couch, languorously RUDOLF kisses the hollow of her throat Then it occurs to him to kiss her ankle BREDZI feels that it is time to shift the tune Raising up on his elbow, RUDOLF suddenly signals the musicians to be quiet) Do you imagine that I need any artificial stimulation from you ? Get out ! (They hurry out at the left, closing the door after them RUDOLF stands up) It's no use bantering this way and that about it,

Elena I know now if I didn't know before that I have never loved any woman as I love you When I see you I know that I've never loved anyone else at all You were, you are and ever will be the one passion of my life Now !
Glow with justifiable pride

ELENA I am glowing What other women have you known since then ?

RUDOLF Plenty All kinds

ELENA All colours ?

RUDOLF All shades There have been French women, English women, Americans I've had a few tempting offers of marriage, but Then there have been Russians, Moroccans, Siamese

ELENA Twins ?

RUDOLF No, unfortunately But I can swear to you, Elena, that all of them were no more than incidents Whatever enjoyment I've had from them—and I'll be generous and admit that there has been some enjoyment—has been vicarious Every quivering one of them has been no more than a proxy for you Ah, Elena—if you could know how I've clung to you, how I've cherished you Memory has been kind to me, my darling It has kept you with me, through all the nights and days (*He is again on the couch, at her side She jumps to her feet, walks quickly away There is a nervous irritability in her voice*)

ELENA It has been otherwise with me !

RUDOLF What do you mean ?

ELENA Memory has been kinder to me It has discreetly withdrawn

RUDOLF Behind the curtains of your imagination—but it is still there, alive and warm, aching to emerge

ELENA No, it is dead !

RUDOLF I refuse to accept that sight unseen

ELENA I have looked behind the curtains and seen it It is decayed and loathsome

RUDOLF You're talking nonsense from your husband's books

ELENA I'm talking truth—bitter truth, for you, perhaps

RUDOLF I don't believe it

ELENA Because you will not face the one important fact

RUDOLF Which is what ?

ELENA I am happy with my husband (*He laughs*) I love him !

RUDOLF You will notice that I am laughing

ELENA And you may notice that I am not going to bed with you

RUDOLF Elena ! Will you tell me that never once during the years of your union with this great thinker, never once have you shut your eyes and assured yourself, " It's Rudolf Maximilian "

ELENA Not in years have I thought of that

RUDOLF But there were times at first, weren't there ? Many times ?

ELENA There may have been

RUDOLF I thought so—and they became less frequent as the years went by—not because you were learning to be happy with him, but because you were learning to be resigned You see—I know something about your psychology, too Now, come—we've had enough of debate It's time for a little emotion We'll see if we've forgotten what life tastes like

ELENA (*indicating the door at the left*) I'm going back in there

RUDOLF You are not ! (*He seizes her wrist and pulls her against him, then holds her tightly in his arms*) You are now expected to shriek

ELENA I shall not shriek

RUDOLF Forgive me I had forgotten that you are not the shrieking kind That was always one of your most engaging qualities, Elena You invariably knew when you were beaten (*He kisses her several times, on her eyes, ears, nose and throat She offers no apparent resistance and no response*) Ah, Elena, my only darling—it isn't easy for you to yield, is it ? You keep on thinking of that wedding ring in my pocket You're loyal to him, because you have the courage to be decent You were always loyal, always brave But with me, it isn't as it would be with anyone else Can't you see that ? I loved you first And you loved me You weren't lying when you said you loved me You never knew how to lie And I'm only asking you to love me again, for a little while, reminiscently, not as a rival of your husband, but as the echo of a voice that enchanted you when you were innocent and impressionable and young You can't tell me that those things have changed I can see that they haven't You have not grown old The warmth is still in you You can still make me adore you, and I can still make you love me ! (*He sits down on the couch, still holding her tightly as she stands before him*) Why not admit it, Elena ? Why maintain that formidable rigidity, as though you were a pure-minded schoolgirl in the clutches of an avid gorilla ? Relax, my darling Let yourself go (*She has begun to laugh*) Have I happened to say something witty ? (*ELENA continues to laugh*) There is something in the quality of that laughter which suggests that I'm wasting my time wooing you

ELENA You told me to let myself go !

RUDOLF I did, but it was not intended as a pleasantry (*He is seated on the couch She is standing over him Suddenly, she seizes his face and kisses him as ferociously as he had kissed her*) Great God, Elena, I didn't expect

ELENA (*passionately*) No, you didn't expect me to take your advice so quickly (*She slaps his face*) Did you? You thought I'd keep up the pretence of frigidity for ever, didn't you? (*She kisses him again As she does so, he pulls her down on to the couch She rolls over him*) Am I frozen now?

RUDOLF No, there's been an unaccountable thaw (*She kisses him again*)

ELENA Am I restraining myself now? Am I being subdued, repressed, coldly unresponsive? Am I? (*She slaps him again*)

RUDOLF No! But for God's sake, Elena—there is such a thing as going too far

ELENA No, there isn't Let's open the doors

RUDOLF No

ELENA Yes! I want them to see that I haven't changed, that there are some things that can never change (*She goes to the doors, flings them open, and shouts "Come on—come on!"*) POFFY, GISELLA and the rest come in, laughing, shouting BREDZI and JANSEI are with them, playing "*The Merry Widow*" waltz)

RUDOLF (*through the happy din*) Look at her! Look at her! She has been hitting me—hitting me with all the old enthusiasm! Show them how you did it, darling! (*She slaps him again He kisses her gratefully Then he picks her up in his arms and waltzes her into the bedroom*) KOEPPKE rushes after them and smugly closes the door The others cheer lustily and wave their champagne glasses)

TALISZ I give them both happiness!

SOPHIA Happiness—and love !

POFFY May the night last for ever ! (*He is standing on the sofa, singing, while BREDZI plays softly The COUNTESS crosses to the COUNT, who kisses her*)

COUNTESS This is the most enchanting moment of my life (*HOETZLER bows to GISELLA, who curtsies, and they begin to waltz SOPHIA goes to the couch*)

SOPHIA (*transported*) It is the same Vienna—the same exquisite Vienna

COUNT Just as it always was ! Nothing has changed

COUNTESS I don't care if I die to-morrow I really don't care at all (*LUCHER bustles in, terribly perturbed*)

LUCHER (*to HOETZLER*) Hush ! Where has he gone ? (*Waltzing with GISELLA, the GENERAL ignores LUCHER, who dashes to the left and shouts at KOEPPKE*) Where is he ?

KOEPPKE We don't wish to be disturbed now

TALISZ What is she saying ?

LUCHER (*thundering*) Bredzi ! Stop ! (*The music stops POFFY, still standing on the couch and singing, turns to LUCHER*)

POFFY (*sublimely unworried*) Is there anything the matter ?

LUCHER Herr Povoromo ! Get down off that brocade ! (*POFFY descends They all laugh*) The police are here ! They've heard this racket and one of the bottles you threw hit somebody in the street (*Gleeful cheers hail this gratifying news*)

KOEPPKE (*archly*) They'll hear no uproar from the arch ducal chamber

LUCHER Where has he gone ? And Frau Krug ? What's he done with her ?

SOPHIA We haven't the faintest idea (*They all laugh*)

COUNT Resume the music, Bredzi (*The general's mildly intoxicated laughter is interrupted by the sound of sharp knocking from within the bedroom*)

HOETZLER What is that?

RUDOLF (*off stage*) Elena! Elena! (*More pounding is heard LUCHER starts up to the door HOETZLER, SOPHIA, KOEPPKE and GISELLA stop her*)

LUCHER Have you all gone crazy? The police will get him!

SOPHIA Ssh! (*RUDOLF bursts out of the room, rushes to the right Through the opened door, on the bed, is ELENA's white dress*)

RUDOLF Elena! Elena! (*He goes out at the right, then returns*) Where is she? Why do you all stand there, frozen? Go after her Find her (*HOETZLER, SOPHIA, the COUNT, TALISZ and KOEPPKE go off babbling "We'll find her We'll bring her back," etc*) I never should have trusted her to go into that bathroom alone

COUNTESS (*frightened*) How did she get out? Did she jump out of the window?

RUDOLF No She went through another door I wouldn't have trusted her if it hadn't been for the affectionate way she hit me Elena! (*He is still pacing about frantically, from door to door SOPHIA comes in again*)

SOPHIA She's left the hotel!

COUNTESS She ought to be ashamed of herself

LUCHER She's gone home!

RUDOLF Home? And where is that? Where does she live?

LUCHER You've got to stay here

RUDOLF Why?

LUCHER The police

POFFY They re in the hotel now

RUDOLF Get my cap

LUCHER I tell you she's gone back to her husband

RUDOLF That psycho-analyst ? So much the better Get my cap ! (*He propels LUCHER toward the bedroom*) Now which one of you verminous objects is going to tell me where she lives ?

GISELLA I don t know where she lives

RUDOLF (*to the COUNTESS*) Do you know ?

COUNTESS (*timorously*) Poffy can tell you Poffy knows

RUDOLF (*to POFFY*) You will escort me there

POFFY If you set foot out of this hotel you re insane

RUDOLF You re still threatening me with the police ?

POFFY They ll recognise you, Your Highness

SOPHIA Oh, we *beg* of Your Highness

RUDOLF Any member of the Vienna police force who lays a hand on me will find himself at the bottom of the canal (*LUCHER has returned with the Tyrolean hat*)

LUCHER Here !

RUDOLF No ! My military cap !

LUCHER That uniform is no longer worn in Vienna

RUDOLF I don't give ten thousand damns what's worn

LUCHER (*screaming at him*) They'll shoot you They'll jump at the chance to finish you

RUDOLF (*calmly*) Very well Very well (*He has put on the hat, and a cape which POFFY has brought for him*)

LUCHER She doesn't want you any more

RUDOLF Oh, yes, she does She's leading me on She wants the thrill of the chase Well—she shall have it ! (*He crosses to the right and picks up the brandy bottle from the table*) And if the accommodations at her house are inadequate I'll bring her back here So see to it that this party is still going on when I return, whether it's to-morrow—or the next day—or whenever Come on, Poffy (*He has gone out, followed by POFFY*)

COUNTESS (*thrilled*) He'll do it ! He'll do it !

GISELLA Nothing will stop him

SOPHIA He'll bring her back, and the party will go on for ever !

LUCHER You fools ! You fools ! Don't you see what will happen ? They'll catch him They'll kill him To-morrow there'll be another Habsburg burning in hell (*POFFY comes in quickly*)

POFFY Frau Lucher !

LUCHER (*gasping*) Have they got him ?

POFFY No His Imperial Highness presents his compliments and wishes you to advance him a few schillings for his taxi fare (*LUCHER is muttering a series of unprintable imprecations as she digs into her capacious hand bag*)

CURTAIN

ACT III

Again the living room in the KRUG home

The time is directly after the end of Act II

There are spots of light about the room, but the surrounding shadows are deep In one of the areas of shadow ANTON is seated, listening to the radio, though not relaxed He continually looks toward the window—toward the door After a moment, he rises and crosses to the window, parts the curtains, and peers out

ELENA comes in, breathless and agitated RUDOLF's cape is about her, clutched tightly, masking the absence of her white dress She hurries past ANTON and turns off the radio

ANTON (*turning from the window*) Well, how was it ?

ELENA Just about as I expected

ANTON Amusing ?

ELENA No

ANTON No excitement ?

ELENA None

ANTON You didn't stay there very long

ELENA Didn't I ? (*She is going toward her room*)

ANTON (*gently*) It was evidently a bit upsetting

ELENA It was nothing of the kind

ANTON I don't like to question you, Elena, but I'm rather afraid that

ELENA (*with uncharacteristic petulance*) You like nothing better than to question me (*She is at the back He is still by the window at the right*)

ANTON You know that's not so

ELENA Oh—not usually But to-night why did you ask me to go ? Why ?

ANTON I thought you might have a good time

ELENA You were wrong You know, Anton, your prescriptions are not infallible But—let's not talk about it now I'm tired (OLD KRUG *has come in from the upper left He is in his bath robe, night shirt and slippers*)

KRUG Ah ! So you're back I *thought* I heard you come in Well, how was the party ? Did anything interesting happen ? Tell us all about it

ANTON She's going to bed

KRUG Who all was there ? Any famous people ? (ELENA *has gone up to the door of her room*) And what—where's your *dress* ?

ELENA Good night, father Good night, Anton (*She goes into her room*)

KRUG Hmm ! Well, what do you make of it ? (ANTON *crosses to the left, lights a cigarette, nervously KRUG comes down slowly*) Didn't you notice anything about the way she said good night ? No kisses, nor sweet dreams, nor any affection And that costume ? She was wearing a dress when she left here, wasn't she ? There's something the matter Didn't you notice it ?

ANTON (*sharply*) No !

KRUG Well, if you didn't I *did* ! And I don't set myself up as a great mind reader, like you I could see that something happened there at Lucher's

ANTON She's tired, that's all

KRUG Yes—but *why* is she tired ? That's what we ought to know And what happened to her dress ? That's what we ought to find out You ought to ask a few questions about this (*The insistent ringing of the night bell is heard*)

ANTON There's nothing to find out

KRUG There's the night bell

ANTON I can hear it

KRUG What do you suppose it is ?

ANTON I haven't the faintest idea (*From the right can be heard peremptory pounding on the front door and loud shouts ANTON crosses to the right and goes out*)

KRUG But listen That sounds like trouble

RUDOLF (*off stage*) You needn't announce me

KATHIE (*shrieking, off stage*) Oh ! Herr Professor ! It's a madman

KRUG (*excited*) You'd better get out your pistol, Anton It's another one of your patients gone insane

KATHIE (*off stage*) A maniac ! His keeper is with him but he won't listen He forced his way in I couldn't stop him

POFFY (*off stage*) I'm sorry, Herr Professor If there had been any conceivable way of avoiding this

RUDOLF A thousand pardons for the disturbance, but this dutiful handmaiden seemed to feel that I should be denied admittance (*By now, RUDOLF has entered followed by POFFY, ANTON and KATHIE RUDOLF is still carrying the bottle of brandy, as a weapon He addresses KRUG*) Are you the doctor ?

KRUG Yes ! No !

RUDOLF No ?

KRUG No ! He is (*He points to ANTON RUDOLF turns and confronts the husband of ELENA*) And I am his father

RUDOLF Ah ! So you are the Herr Professor

Doctor ! I am frankly surprised My imagination had adorned you with a grey beard, a long one (*He bows*) How do you do ?

ANTON Who are you ?

RUDOLF Eh ? You are asking me who ?

KRUG I can tell you who he is

RUDOLF He doesn't know who I am, Poffy Come—step up ! Present me

POFFY Professor Krug—this is the former Archduke Rudolf Maximillian

RUDOLF The former ! One would think I had already joined my ancestors in their eternal empire

KRUG Oh ! No !

RUDOLF However, my dear doctor, you will readily observe that such is not the case I am here, in your charming home, and I wish to see your wife

ANTON My wife has gone to bed

RUDOLF She will wish to be aroused (*ANTON regards RUDOLF for a moment, then crosses in front of him and addresses KRUG*)

ANTON Go to bed, father

KRUG Me ?

ANTON (*motioning him off*) Yes ! Do as you're told (*In a state of extreme disgruntlement, OLD KRUG turns and ambles slowly up toward the steps RUDOLF removes his hat*)

RUDOLF (*to POFFY*) And you're no longer needed, Poffy Go back to Lucher's and see that they carry on

POFFY I beg of you to come with me

RUDOLF I may be detained a little longer than I had expected

POFFY I'll be at the hotel on call (*POFFY goes out at the right* KRUG is now at the door of ELENA'S room)

KRUG (*calling through the door*) Elena, the Archduke Rudolf Maximilian von Habsburg is calling on us and they're sending me to bed (*KRUG goes on out at the upper left* ANTON confronts RUDOLF, who holds the brandy bottle at the alert *After a moment, ANTON smiles and advances toward RUDOLF*)

ANTON I—I wish I could tell you how glad I am to see you

RUDOLF (*startled*) You're glad—to see me ?

ANTON I should think you could imagine why You've been something of a presence in my home, for a long time, ever since Elena and I were married Not an entirely agreeable presence, I might add (*He laughs*) But one that we could never quite get rid of At times, you've stalked about this house as if you owned it

RUDOLF (*pleased*) I have ?

ANTON I naturally resented it, a little But now that I have the chance to see you and talk to you, I can feel much more friendly toward that presence

RUDOLF (*bewildered*) Well ! I've known husbands in my time—but you're the first one who ever granted me a kind word (*He steps forward They bow and shake hands*) I'm glad to see you, too, Herr Professor Your vast reputation has not done you justice

ANTON A remarkably graceful compliment !

RUDOLF Of course, I've known you through your books Oh, yes ! I've studied them, carefully

ANTON All eight volumes ?

RUDOLF You don't believe me, do you ? Very well—cross examine me !

ANTON No, no I don't like cross examinations I m only too eager to take your word for it

RUDOLF It's very fortunate that you are Otherwise I should have been proved a liar
(*He puts his hand affectionately on ANTON s shoulder They both laugh* ELENA comes in, now wearing a *négligée*) But I'm going to read them I know now that they're good (*He sees ELENA*) Elena, we re friends !

[ELENA, on the landing, looks from RUDOLF to ANTON

ELENA Are you ?

ANTON Of course we are We see eye to eye on the most important subject

RUDOLF As a matter of fact, we re an incredibly happy combination Your husband represents the sublimity of the intellectual, and I the quintessence of the emotional You know—between us, just about there—(*he points to a spot on the carpet*)—there ought to be found the perfect man ! (*ANTON laughs ELENA comes down, goes over to the left, beside ANTON*)

ANTON Please go on talking

RUDOLF Gladly ! I have a great deal of interest to say (*He sits down in a chair in the centre*)

ELENA I hope you'll cut it short, Rudolf Not that I'm unmindful of the great distinction conferred on our house by your presence here—but I'm sleepy We're sleepy

RUDOLF I am still confident of my ability to keep you awake But my words are not for you, my darling They are for our mutual friend, your husband

ANTON I am anxious to hear them

RUDOLF I'm sure you are And I'm equally sure that you'll be sympathetic You're a brilliant psychologist—but more than that, you're a Viennese You will know what I mean (ANTON *bows*) But here—I seem to be the only one who's seated Won't you please sit down?

ANTON No—if you don't mind (ELENA *sits down on the edge of the couch*)

RUDOLF (*settling back in the chair*) No, I don't mind Well—to begin at the beginning—always a suitable starting point Herr Professor—I have been making advances to your wife I am here now to continue them until the desired objective has been reached Am I making myself clear?

ANTON Perfectly clear

ELENA So far

RUDOLF Good! You are obviously a man of superior perception You will not fail to see the validity of my claim Fifteen years ago I became intimate with Elena And when I say that I became intimate with her, I hope you will understand that I

ANTON I am familiar with the preface You may skip it

RUDOLF No, no I decline to do so Indeed, I wish to dwell on it She was then a maiden, exquisitely frail, standing hesitantly upon the threshold of infinite potentiality, if you will forgive my eloquence Ah—she was lovely, Herr Professor You would have adored her

ANTON I'm sure of it

RUDOLF As for myself, I was then, as now, a rank idealist—and when I first looked upon her, and felt the touch of her hand and saw the virginal invitation that was in her eyes, I vowed to myself, 'This is the ultimate!' So I made

her my mistress For four beautiful years, I was devotedly

ELENA It was hardly more than two

RUDOLF Don't interrupt !

ELENA Don't exaggerate !

RUDOLF (*rising, enraged*) If I'm to be interrupted !

ELENA Don't *exaggerate* !

RUDOLF I do so only because of a desire to flatter you (*He turns apologetically to ANTON*) Permit me to continue our idyllic romance was terminated by the Revolution Austria was compelled to give up most of her treasured provinces and possessions, including my family (*He sits down again*) We were at Lucher's together when the summons came I promised her I'd return immediately—but I didn't return I never even had a chance to say good bye to her (*He has said this almost to himself He turns now to ANTON*) We were denied the privilege of parting as most lovers do, with the customary romantic heroism—hypocritical self sacrifice We were wrenched apart (*He indicates the arbitrary separation with a gesture of his clenched fists*) Surely, Herr Doctor, *you* can see the significance of that wrench

ANTON I've seen a great deal of it

RUDOLF (*resuming*) The pretence of adjustment had to be made In my exile I concluded that I should never see my darling again, and I made every effort to reconcile myself to that dismal realisation The effort was not completely successful For ten years I have felt the lack of her So I decided to return to Vienna, and have one more look at her, and let my youthful illusions be shattered once and for all

ANTON That was a highly intelligent decision—wasn't it, Elena ?

ELENA I'm not quite certain

RUDOLF Oh, it was, in theory For I assumed that she would have become a commonplace, obese, bourgeois housewife

ANTON She has resisted the influences surrounding her

RUDOLF She has, indeed, and I've been grievously disappointed I find that my acute want of her was no illusion It remains a fact (*He rises*) A fact ! (*He crosses and stands behind the couch*) Which we all must face

ELENA Yes, Anton

RUDOLF Perhaps you don't believe that it is a fact Elena didn't at first I told her something this evening—something that I'd have confessed to no other woman I told her that all the enjoyment I've had has been vicarious I, too, have been conscious of a presence Elena has been in attendance at all the sordid little romances I have ever known (*Turning to ELENA*) Oh, my dear, you'd be horrified if you knew how many fantastic shapes you have assumed (*To ANTON*) That sounds a bit disgusting, doesn't it ?

ANTON Nothing is disgusting that is said with such artless sincerity

RUDOLF (*to ELENA*) He's charming—charming ! (*To ANTON*) I *knew* you were qualified to deal with this situation, Herr Doctor You see, Elena told me you've written a whole book about me

ANTON What ?

ELENA I told him nothing of the kind

RUDOLF You did You distinctly said he'd analysed me

ELENA (*cutting in*) I did not I said he'd written

about that much, explaining your type (*She indicates about two inches between her thumb and fore finger*)

RUDOLF (*to ANTON*) Evidently you can say volumes in a few words Ah, Herr Doctor—it's enlightening to confront anyone like you, who can view things impersonally, and with none of the usual moralistic indignation You're a scientist—thank God—and I beg of you to consider me as your patient Analyse me Subject me to the treatment that you know I need

ANTON I'm afraid that's impossible, my friend

ELENA (*to RUDOLF*) That's absurd It takes a long time to complete a treatment

RUDOLF So much the better I don't mind remaining in Vienna indefinitely But now is the time to begin, Herr Doctor I want some professional advice

ANTON I can't give it

RUDOLF But I insist that you can

ELENA It's not his custom to give advice

RUDOLF Nonsense—he's a doctor—a distinguished one

ELENA By a process of suggestion, he compels the patient to advise himself

RUDOLF (*to ANTON*) Very well, then—suggest something

ANTON No You have ideas of your own

RUDOLF A bewilderingly wide variety

ANTON I don't doubt it But it is useless for me to try to consider this in the light of my own experience, because I have never confronted this problem in just this way before

RUDOLF Why, with Elena for a wife I should

think that this sort of thing would be coming up all the time

ANTON I agree one would naturally think so
(ANTON is beginning to betray evidences of impatience which might easily develop into violent wrath)

ELENA But one would be wrong

RUDOLF Well, I'm glad

ANTON I'm only a psychiatrist Your case requires the specialised services of a neuro pathologist There is a very good one in Munich

RUDOLF Munich ? But that's a long way off—and the night is slipping through our fingers

ANTON That's the only advice I can give you, Herr von Habsburg There's nothing I can do to help you

RUDOLF (*appalled*) Herr von Habsburg ! So that's my name ? Herr von Habsburg ! Oh—I'm not protesting It is my name ! It would have been patronising to call me anything else Forgive me for interrupting (*During the foregoing speech he has crossed to the left, close to ANTON, as though, for a moment, he had considered a demonstration of his resentment of the humiliating Herr* He now sits down, slumping, on a chair that is between ANTON, who is standing before the fire place, and ELENA, on the couch It should be noted that through this dialogue ELENA is watching both of them with enthralled interest alarmed expectancy and mounting excitement With apparent weariness, RUDOLF continues) You were saying something about a doctor in Munich

ANTON Yes I'll give you a letter to him, and I urge that you go and consult him at once

RUDOLF (*with a flash of anger*) But I don't want to go to Munich ! I want this problem to be settled now !

ANTON I'm not a witch doctor I can't

straighten out a mass of glandular complications with a wave of the hand

RUDOLF (*surprised but amused*) Oh, but I'm not complicated—even though I do like to represent myself as an enigma (*To ELENA*) You don't mind my talking about myself?

ELENA Not at all We're used to it

RUDOLF It's a fascinating subject You must realise, Herr Doctor, that for all my talk, I'm simply a man who lives on sensations They're meat and drink and breath of life to me At the moment, I'm desperately in need of nourishment—nourishment for my self esteem My ego is like the belly of a starving man—it's bloated but empty

ANTON And you imagine that *I* can furnish the necessary nourishment?

RUDOLF If you can't—no one else can

ANTON If this could be dealt with in a rational manner, it would be simple I'd tell you to look at her to your heart's content—fill your imagination with her (*RUDOLF turns and stares at ELENA and continues to do so while ANTON snaps out the following*) And then see for yourself that for you she has no substance, she's a dream that you've explained, and disposed of, and that you can never recapture But it isn't so simple as all that (*Slowly RUDOLF turns away from ELENA, rises, confronts ANTON*)

RUDOLF You're right, my friend It isn't so simple I must do more than just look (*ANTON walks away, toward the right*)

ELENA Well, Anton—what have you to say to that?

ANTON (*irritably*) There's nothing for me to say I don't want to have anything to say (*There is a pregnant pause*)

RUDOLF I know—it's a damned awkward

situation And it wouldn't have arisen if it hadn't been for your decency When I came in here I was ready to fight, and either be dragged out myself, or take Elena with me But—you were so kind You were so friendly You showed me that this dispute should be settled by reason as opposed to force

ANTON I find that this dispute has become essentially unreasonable

RUDOLF It has not ! My impulses are entirely natural

ANTON And so are my objections to your impulses

RUDOLF Oh ! So you do object ?

ANTON Yes ! I do ! (*His attitude is now one of undisguised belligerence*)

RUDOLF You re not friendly with me any more Why ? Do you imagine that I want to take her away from you for good and all ? I can reassure you on that point I am not attempting to shatter your home I am asking for only a moment, a fragment of revival That will give me enough to live on for another ten years—by which time I'll hardly be a serious menace to you or to anyone Now—surely—you can have no objection to that ?

ANTON You re forcing me into the hellishly uncomfortable position of a jealous husband

RUDOLF If you will permit me to say so, you assumed that position voluntarily when you married her

ANTON Yes, yes ! I know that !

RUDOLF You admitted the presence that is in your house, and now that the presence has materialised, are you afraid to face it ?

ELENA No ! Anton ! You won't let him say that

RUDOLF No ! No ! I don't believe it ! You're a man of exalted intellect You know that jealousy is merely a manifestation of fear, and you have banished fear as completely as you have banished the odious Habsburgs Isn't that so ?

ANTON We've expelled the Habsburgs from Austria but not all of us have expelled the Habsburgs from ourselves Now, I want you to leave

RUDOLF What ?

ANTON I'm asking you to go

RUDOLF Taking Elena with me ?

ANTON No

RUDOLF Even though she might want to go ?

ANTON Have you bothered to consult her as to that ? (*ELENA rises and crosses to the fire place*)

ELENA Oh, leave me out of this I'm only the guerdon in this conflict You will have to dispose of me between yourselves

ANTON Get out !

RUDOLF Oh—I'm disappointed in you, Herr Doctor I thought you were one who had conquered all the baser emotions But now I see that you *are* just a husband—no better than the rest of them

ANTON Unless you go of your own accord, I shall attempt to put you out—and I believe I shall succeed

RUDOLF I'm sure you can But not without making a ridiculous spectacle of yourself

ANTON (*taking off his glasses*) Then I shall not delay the process (*He now starts to take off his coat Observing this, RUDOLF starts to take off his coat, turning to ELENA as he does so*)

RUDOLF There, Elena ! I have exposed him

before your eyes This colossus of the intellect, this triumph of civilisation, is behaving like a vindictive ape

ANTON Get out !

RUDOLF (*going up and putting his coat on the balcony rail*) I have to warn you that I m not going to fight fair

ANTON You d better not watch this, Elena

ELENA Nothing could induce me to leave now ! (*She sits down on the bench before the fire place*) I ve just realised that I ve been waiting for this moment for years

RUDOLF That s right Stay where you are When I ve had enough I ll call to you and you can drag him off me (*He picks up a small, modernistic metal statue from the book case and brandishes it*) Come on, Herr Professor It s for you to begin the brawl

ELENA Put that down ! (*RUDOLF examines the statue*)

RUDOLF Do you like that ?

ELENA Put it down ! (*Reluctantly he obeys*)

RUDOLF (*to ANTON*) I m now unarmed I m a competent swordsman but I m hopelessly inept with my fists I m forced to the indignity of treating with you I ll make you an offer

ANTON Make it quickly

RUDOLF A very handsome one

ANTON Make it quickly !

RUDOLF (*with convincing fervour*) If you ll permit your intelligence to triumph over your mediæval scruples, and grant me this negligible favour, then I shall give to you in return my one possession—namely, this carcass that I wear about my immortal soul, these priceless pounds of flesh To morrow I shall go forth upon the

Ringstrasse I shall kick and insult policemen
My identity will become known I shall be
beaten to earth and shot, and I shall die gloriously
in the gutter, my head pillowed on a pile
of excrement But before I take this suicidal
action, I shall sign documents bequeathing my
remains, unconditionally, to the eminent Professor
Doctor what s the name ?

ELENA Krug

RUDOLF Krug ! All that is left of me will be
yours You will appreciate my value to science
You may lay me out on your operating table,
you may probe, dissect me, discover just what
it is about me that has made me what I am, the
quality that dominated most of Europe for six
hundred years You will be able to say to your
students " Here, gentlemen—this revolting
object that I hold before you is the heart of a
Habsburg ! " (*There is a prolonged pause*) No ?
You reject my offer ? You insist on being
primitive ? Very well, then ! Come on, Herr
Doctor— (*He steps back and achieves a pose*) I m
waiting for that bull like rush

ANTON You are succeeding in your object

RUDOLF I—succeeding ?

ANTON You are making a fool of me I should
have heeded your warning that you wouldn't
fight fair There are a thousand excellent reasons
why I should hit you and I know all those
reasons But confronting you this way, in the
presence of my wife, whom I wish above all
others to impress, I can't do it I could finish
the fight, but I can't star it

ELENA No, Anton, you're wrong You couldn't
finish it I am the only one who could do that
I should have known it there at Lucher's (*The
night bell rings*) I shouldn't have tried to escape
That's the mistake I've always (*The bell rings
again*) Who is that ?

RUDOLF Don't tell me that the doctor is being summoned to a patient ! (*The bell rings again*)

ELENA Shall I go ? (*She crosses to the right*)

ANTON No—Kathie is awake (*OLD KRUG comes in*)

KRUG I heard the bell ! I thought it might be something important

RUDOLF Let us hope it is not a matter of life and death (*KATHIE comes in at the right*)

KATHIE Herr Professor Doctor ! (*POFFY rushes in*)

POFFY Herr Professor Doctor, my deepest apologies for bursting in in this manner but

ANTON What is it ?

POFFY It's the police

KRUG The police !

ANTON What do they want ?

POFFY His Imperial Highness was seen tearing down the Kartnerstrasse in a taxi

[*OLD KRUG whistles*]

ELENA They want him ! They've found out about him !

RUDOLF By all means let them have me It's an easy disposition of your problem, Herr Professor

ELENA No You will have to hide Go in there

ANTON What good will that do ? The police will keep on till they find him

RUDOLF I shall not hide ! I prefer to stand and face them

ELENA No, you won't Go in there Kathie—tell the police that Dr Krug will see them in a moment

KATHIE Yes, ma'am (*She goes*)

POFFY (*to* RUDOLF) You must hide! The whole force is out searching for you

RUDOLF (*going up*) This is the very depth of ignominy

KRUG In here, Your Imperial Highness

ELENA Here! (*She hands him his Tyrolean hat*)

RUDOLF I will not be arrested in this God damned hat! (*He goes into the room at the back*)

ELENA Shut the door, father (*KRUG does so—ELENA motions him to his bedroom He pouts but goes out, upper left*)

ANTON We'll have to see them

POFFY I beg of you, Herr Professor, go down and send them away

ANTON Do you think that will stop them from going on with their search?

POFFY But surely, they will listen to you
Your position

ANTON They know perfectly well that there was every likelihood of his coming here might get them out of this house, but I can't prevent them from keeping a close watch on it

POFFY But you have the greatest influence with the authorities You can speak to them persuade them

ANTON To do what? To allow him to remain here as my guest?

POFFY No—to permit him to leave Austria quietly If you will only say a word to Herr Wreede the prefect He's out at Schönbrunn

And I can swear to you that the Archduke will abide by any arrangement you choose to make

KATHIE Yes, ma'am (*She goes*)

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ANTON (*to ELENA*) So I'm to go to Schonbrunn and make all the arrangements

ELENA Oh, yes, Anton You must do every thing you can to help him

POFFY You will be performing an act of the greatest generosity !

ELENA Yes, Anton (*ANTON stares at ELENA for a moment, then turns to POFFY*)

ANTON Will you please wait for me downstairs ?

POFFY Yes, Herr Professor Doctor (*He bows and goes There is another pause*)

ANTON An act of great generosity ! And let us hope of great wisdom

ELENA Have you any doubt of the wisdom, Anton ?

ANTON Yes, I have, but I must not admit it (*He is making a gallant attempt to be ironic*) You see, Elena—I am facing the test of my own relentless principles You've heard what my students call me ' the messiah of a new faith ' Well—to night I ve heard the bitter injunction that is given to all messiahs Physician, heal thyself' Its not a comforting thought However—I must go out to Schonbrunn and see Wreede I must make the necessary arrangements I shan t be back before morning

ELENA Oh !

ANTON Yes ! (*He comes close to her*) You saw the truth, Elena You saw it, at last, when he goaded me into behaving like—like a vindictive ape You are the only one who can settle it If you can look at him, and laugh at him, and pity him, as you'd pity a deluded child , if you can see him for what he is, and not for what your memory tells you that he was—then you're free

He can never hurt you, whatever he does, or whatever you do

ELENA Very well, Anton

ANTON (*he stares at her for a moment*) Good bye, Elena And tell him not to worry (*He turns and starts to go*) Herr Wreede will be glad to do me a favour His wife is one of my patients (*He has gone out at the right* ELENA *stands still for a moment, then turns and calls, "Rudolf! Rudolf!"* RUDOLF *opens the door and peers out* ELENA *crosses to the left*)

ELENA They've gone You can come out (*RUDOLF emerges, still in his shirt sleeves, carrying his uniform coat His tone during the subsequent scene is elaborately sardonic*)

RUDOLF Are you sure it's safe?

ELENA Perfectly

RUDOLF Where is your husband?

ELENA He has gone out

RUDOLF Where?

ELENA To see the prefect of police

RUDOLF And what am I to do in the meanwhile—put on my coat and go?

ELENA No You can't The police are down there

RUDOLF They were reluctant to take your husband's word?

ELENA Yes—but you can rely on Anton He has great influence with the officials He'll see to it that you are allowed to leave Austria safely

RUDOLF (*coming down*) So I'm to rely on him, am I?

ELENA There's no one else who could do as much for you

RUDOLF The soul of magnanimity, isn't he?

ELENA Yes

RUDOLF And trustful, too !

ELENA Yes

RUDOLF And sublimely confident of your strength

ELENA Yes !

RUDOLF And contemptuous of me (*She says nothing He throws his coat down on the couch, and glowers at the door through which ANTON departed*) As effective a bit of foul play as I have ever witnessed ! He's tricked me into his debt—put me on my honour He knows that I have that It runs in my royal blood—honour and epilepsy We deserved to be thrown out—not because we were tyrants, but because we were all at heart rotten sentimentalists The doctor has discovered the essential weakness

ELENA I told you his method of cure He influences the patient to advise himself

RUDOLF Yes—and what he has made me advise myself is not very gratifying to my vanity or stimulating to my lecherous impulses God damn him ! He's devitalised me, emasculated me (*He sits down on the end of the couch, his fury and much of his bumptiousness have gone out of him*) While I was in there, hiding, waiting for him to protect me from the law, I looked at my coat, and the obsolete medals, and the worn-out lining, and a great truth dawned on me It came to me in a revelation that I am no longer an Archduke, nephew of an Emperor, I am a taxi-driver, dressed up !

ELENA And did your revelation also disclose to you what I am now ?

RUDOLF Yes ! You're no longer a mistress—you're a wife—and consequently unprepossessing

ELENA Ah ! You have realised that at last !

ELENA You will, Rudolf You'll always wear it, gallantly—even if the lining is a little torn It's your coat (*She hands him the coat*)

RUDOLF Yes ! One of the meagre possessions of Herr von Habsburg ! (*He puts the coat on the balustrade*) You're very sweet, Elena I don't quite know why you should be, in view of the ridiculous trouble I've caused But please remember that I'm grateful—and also sorry (*She takes his hand*)

ELENA No, Rudolf—you must never be sorry

RUDOLF Good night, my dear (*He kisses her hand*) Good bye (*He goes into the bedroom*
For some moments, she stands still At length, she picks up his coat, looks at the worn lining and the tarnished medals, hanging limply Then she turns, switches out the lights so that the stage is in darkness except for a faint glow from the hallway She opens the door of her room The light from within shines on her)

ELENA Rudolf

RUDOLF (*from off stage*) Yes ? (*She goes into the room and closes the door behind her*)

CURTAIN

The curtain is down a few seconds to indicate the passage of several hours Its rise reveals morning, brilliantly sunny, warm and cheerful KATHIE is completing the arranging of the breakfast table which is at the left of the couch It is set for three

OLD KRUG *shuffles in from the left, carrying the morning paper*

KRUG (*disgusted*) Just as I thought ! Not a word in here about what happened last night One of the most exciting things that's happened

in this city in years, and then they hush it up
(*He sniffs and his expression changes*) Mm !
Kidneys

KATHIE You're not to touch them ! They are
for the Herr Professor Doctor

KRUG I thought as much Oh—well
(*KATHIE starts to go, KRUG follows her, talking*)
Oh, Kathie ! (*She pauses*) What did you think
of our guest, eh ? Did you ever see any one like
that before ?

KATHIE (*scornfully*) No ! (*She resumes her exit*)

KRUG I never did, either—I mean, close to
How did they get rid of him ? What happened
after I went to bed ? (*He is following her out*)

KATHIE (*from off stage*) I haven't the faintest
idea *what* happened !

KRUG (*from off stage*) Well—I'd surely like to
know But it's a sure thing no one's going to tell
me Didn't you *hear* anything ? (*RUDOLF comes
out of the room at the back, and deposits his cape and
his hat on the balustrade* KRUG, *still mumbling,*
returns) I've got to find out all these things for
myself

RUDOLF Good morning Good morning Good
morning ! Whoever you are, I bid you good
morning, and I can assure you I do so with the
most profound sincerity (*KRUG sees who it is,
and is so startled he can only gape* RUDOLF *goes to
the window and looks out*) It has been years since
I have seen one like it You know, it's an ex-
traordinary thing about Vienna, in no other
place on earth will you find a finer quality of
mornings They're ample, they're complete !
They have character Look at this one ! It's
a new day—and, don't forget, that's very
different from saying "another day" You never
hear people in Vienna say "another day has
dawned," do you ? For that's precisely like say-
ing "another Chinaman has been born," an

exact reproduction of all the countless millions and millions of Chinamen that have been born and lived and died It's an appalling thought, isn't it ? (*He crosses toward the breakfast table, by which OLD KRUG, utterly bewildered, is now standing*) No, my dear friend—we Viennese are privileged beings For us, each morning is an adventure, unprecedented and unforgettable A new day ! (*He inspects the array of breakfast*) What have we here ?

KRUG (*weakly*) I thought Your Imperial Highness had gone

RUDOLF What led you to that misconception ? (*He is looking at the various dishes*)

KRUG After the police had left, I heard the front door close again

RUDOLF That was the excellent Herr Professor, going forth to clear the atmosphere Ah ! Kidneys (*He takes the dish and sits down*)

KRUG Those are for my son !

RUDOLF He likes kidneys, does he ? (*He has begun to eat them*)

KRUG He does—and no one is allowed to touch

RUDOLF Please sit down (*KRUG sits across the table*) You know, the more I hear about that gifted scientist, the more I know him to be a gentleman of discernment and taste He and I obviously appreciate the same delicacies

KRUG Where did you sleep last night ?

RUDOLF Now really, my friend—you're a man of the world, aren't you ?

KRUG (*indignantly*) I am nothing of the kind

RUDOLF I envy you It's a poor world You do well to keep out of it If you take my advice, you'll stay here, where you are, in this charming house, in this incomparable city, with a view

of the horse-chestnuts , and leave investigation of the world to those who have no place else to go (ELENA comes in *She is radiant*) Ah ! Our lovely hostess !

KRUG Look, Elena ! Look at who is having breakfast with me !

ELENA Good morning, father Good morning, Rudolf (*She waves toward the window*) Gorgeous, isn't it ?

RUDOLF We've been discussing it, at some length

KRUG You should have heard him, Elena I couldn't make out what he was talking about (*ELENA has come down to the table and taken possession of the coffee pot*)

ELENA Will you have coffee, Rudolf ?

RUDOLF Oh—I'll have everything coffee, with whipped cream, rolls, honey, jam, jelly
(*To KRUG*) By the way, did you ever know why it was that our bakers started making rolls in the shape of crescents ? (*KRUG shakes his head*) It was intended as an expression of our contempt for the Turks (*He is holding up a crescent roll while he talks*)

KRUG Was it really ! (*He takes a bite of a roll, and munches it reflectively, as though appreciating for the first time its full flavour*)

RUDOLF Oh, I could tell you many similar facts of historical importance For instance—about the Serbian pigs

ELENA (*interrupting*) I've forgotten whether you take sugar

RUDOLF (*gazing at her*) So have I (*OLD KRUG laughs heartily*)

ELENA Father ! What are you laughing at ?

KRUG He said he'd forgotten if he takes sugar

RUDOLF I don't blame you for laughing ! I don't blame you a bit It was a fatuous remark

KRUG What ?

RUDOLF A very silly remark As a matter of fact, I take three lumps (*They all laugh at that*)

ELENA (*to KRUG*) He s a fool, isn t he ?

KRUG I should say that he is ! Why, do you know what he said about the morning ? He said it was like a lot of Chinamen ! (*He laughs uproariously So do ELENA and RUDOLF The merriment is interrupted when ANTON comes in, accompanied by POFFY*)

ANTON Good morning

ELENA Anton ! (*She rises and crosses to ANTON*)

KRUG (*pointing to RUDOLF*) Look at *this*, Anton

RUDOLF Before anyone else breaks the news, permit me to announce that I have devoured the kidneys

ELENA Kathie will cook some more Sit down, Anton—and you too, Poffy

ANTON No, I've already had a huge breakfast at the Hotel Lucher But I'm afraid this gentleman hasn't He has been standing out in the street all night

RUDOLF Why in heaven's name have you been doing *that* ?

POFFY The police were still there, and I thought I might be needed

RUDOLF And you were ready to die for your Prince Such gallantry must not pass unnoticed (*He unpins a medal from his coat and tosses it to POFFY, who catches it*)

KRUG (*wide-eyed*) Did you *see* that !

RUDOLF You say you've been at Lucher's ?

ANTON Yes

RUDOLF Is the party still going on ?

ANTON Oh Lord, yes They all entertained me at breakfast

ELENA How are they now ?

ANTON They're getting a little sleepy

RUDOLF (*to OLD KRUG*) Then let's rush over and wake them up ! (*KRUG starts up hopefully*)

ANTON I'm afraid we can't I mean, you and I

RUDOLF Oh !

ANTON We have to start immediately for Passau, where you will be allowed to cross the frontier There's a government car downstairs

RUDOLF I see

ANTON I hate to drag you away

RUDOLF (*rising*) But it's necessary Of course it is Do I have to wear that cape and that hat ?

ELENA Yes—help him, father (*Rising, KRUG throws his napkin down*)

KRUG Oh, *dear* ! Now he has to go !

ELENA But why do you have to go with him, Anton ?

RUDOLF I flatly refuse to hear of such a thing ! I will not take you away from your duties, your home Poffy will escort me

POFFY I should be delighted to

ANTON No I have given my word that I myself will see you depart from Austria The authorities wished me to explain that they will take extraordinary precautions to see that you do not return

RUDOLF I don't blame them I don't blame

them a bit Thank you (*This to OLD KRUG, who has brought him his hat and cape*)

ANTON (*to ELENA*) I shan't be back much before evening Will you tell Zenzi to cancel all my engagements for to-day?

ELENA Yes, Anton I'll tell her And I'll send word to the university

RUDOLF A dutiful wife, Herr Professor I commend her to you—and you to her It is a remarkable union, and it will give me satisfaction to the end of my days to think that perhaps I, in my small way, have contributed something to it

ELENA It's time to go, Rudolf

RUDOLF I know it is But before I depart, Herr Professor, let me say that I call your roof tree blessed! For beneath it a Habsburg has been entertained—royally entertained—and has been granted, into the bargain, a superb demonstration of applied psychology Good-bye, Elena (*He kisses her hand*) No wistful tears, please (*He crosses to POFFY, who bows and kisses RUDOLF's hand*) Good bye, Poffy If you sell that medal for a sou less than a thousand francs, I shall be insulted (*RUDOLF slaps POFFY on the back and crosses to OLD KRUG, who is by the door at the right*) Good-bye, my dear friend Think of me in the mornings (*He kisses OLD KRUG on both cheeks and goes out at the right POFFY and KRUG go up to the window*)

ANTON (*to ELENA*) There'll be no trouble

ELENA Anton—there's something I want to say

ANTON (*hastily*) No, there isn't, Elena You have nothing to say to me I have only to look at you (*He takes her hand*) I must hurry

ELENA Yes, Anton—but I wanted to say—when you get to the frontier, ask him to give you back my wedding ring

ANTON I shall And I left a package for you in the hall Frau Lucher gave it to me It's your white dress (*He kisses ELENA's hand and goes out*)

KRUG (*at the window*) A government car—with the shades drawn ! (*ELENA goes over to the table and sits down, wilfully indifferent to OLD KRUG's excited reports of what is happening in the street below*)

ELENA Sit down, Poffy, and have some breakfast You must be famished

POFFY (*crossing to the table*) I rather imagine that I am (*POFFY sits down ELENA looks at the empty dish*)

KRUG They're just starting—and the police man is *saluting* them !

ELENA All the kidneys are gone Father ! Ring the bell I'll tell Kathie to cook some more

KRUG Enough for me, too ? (*Pressing the bell button*)

ELENA Of course

KRUG Good ! (*He is ambling over to the table*)

ELENA (*pouring coffee*) Cream ?

POFFY No, thanks, Elena I've got out of the habit of cream

ELENA Oh, but this morning (*She puts in cream and hands him the cup*)

KRUG You know, Elena—I've never, in all my life, had so much fun !

ELENA Neither have I (*She smiles slowly at OLD KRUG, then sips her coffee*)

CURTAIN

THE LAUGHING WOMAN

Gordon Daviot

THE LAUGHING WOMAN

A Play

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are Messrs Curtis Brown Limited 6 Henrietta Street Covent
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FOR —

BECAUSE
OF THE HYACINTHS
AT BECOURT

Although the idea of this play was suggested by the life of Henri Gaudier, the sculptor, and of Sophie Brzeska, the author has altered the nature as well as the events of their lives, so that the leading characters are not in any way to be taken as portraits. And the other characters and all the scenes are entirely imaginary.

THE LAUGHING WOMAN was first presented by Howard Wyndham and Bronson Albery at the New Theatre on April 7, 1934, with the following cast

<i>Old Woman</i>	VERONICA TURLEIGH
<i>Passer by</i>	DEREK BIRCH
<i>Attendant</i>	BASIL BEALE
<i>Woman with easel</i>	JOAN GARSTIN
<i>1st Chit</i>	GIPSY RAINE
<i>2nd Chit</i>	DOROTHY HOPE
<i>Mr Honeymoon</i>	WILFRED BABBAGE
<i>Mrs Honeymoon</i>	MARY BRACKLEY
<i>Reporter</i>	ARNOLD RICHES
<i>Rene Latour</i>	STEPHEN HAGGARD
<i>Ingrid Rydman</i>	VERONICA TURLEIGH
<i>Madame Grumier</i>	MAY AGATE
<i>Washerwoman</i>	PHYLLIS MORRIS
<i>Smith</i>	FREDERICK BURTWELL
<i>Mrs Smith</i>	HILDA SIMS
<i>Hazel Graham</i>	LEUEEN MACGRATH
<i>1st Parlourmaid</i>	JOAN GARSTIN
<i>2nd Parlourmaid</i>	MARY BRACKLEY
<i>Laura Gadd</i>	YVETTE PIENNE
<i>Sir Cuthbert Graham</i>	E VIVIAN REYNOLDS
<i>Marion Slade</i>	MAY AGATE
<i>Burchd</i>	LAMONT DICKSON
<i>O'Brien</i>	WILFRED BABBAGE
<i>Butler</i>	BASIL BEALE
<i>Doll Simmons</i>	DOROTHY HOPE
<i>Hergesheimer</i>	MARCUS BARRON
<i>1st Housewife</i>	HILDA SIMS
<i>2nd Housewife</i>	JOAN GARSTIN
<i>Miss Casson</i>	PHYLLIS MORRIS
<i>1st Schoolgirl</i>	MORNA GILLESPIE
<i>2nd Schoolgirl</i>	BRENDA GORDON
<i>3rd Schoolgirl</i>	GIPSY RAINE

This play was produced by LESLIE BANKS

SCENES

PROLOGUE A room in a London art gallery
at the present day

ACT I

SCENE I A sixth floor room in a cheap apartment house in Paris in the year 1912

SCENE II A room in London—six months later

ACT II

SCENE I The same—some weeks later

SCENE II The dining room of the Grahams house in Queen Anne Street, some weeks later

SCENE III A residential street in the West End of London some half an hour later

ACT III

SCENE I The same as Scene 2, Act I—on a late autumn evening

SCENE II The same, but the time is summer

EPILOGUE The same as the Prologue

PROLOGUE

A room in a London art gallery at the present day It is late afternoon On the back wall are hung the usual canvases In front of them, in the centre of the room, are two long, double sided benches such as are usually found in galleries There is a short gap between them, and in the gap is a pedestal bearing the head of a woman carved in a pale stone The woman is smiling, her chin tilted upwards, as if at any moment that secret amusement might break into laughter At the corner of the right-hand bench next the pedestal, facing us, an elderly woman is sitting, quite motionless, her eyes fixed on the floor several yards in front of her Her clothes are poor, shapeless and indefinitely queer And in her attitude there is a great unexpectedness

A man saunters past from right to left, hat in hand, his eyes on the wall of pictures He pauses to examine a canvas through poised eyeglasses, and moves on After a moment an ATTENDANT crosses slowly from left to right He is overtaken by a WOMAN with an easel

WOMAN Eighteenth-century French paintings ?

ATTENDANT Yes, madam Turn to your right at the end, and it's the second room

WOMAN (*moving on*) I thought they should be here ?

ATTENDANT No, madam, this is the modern exhibit

[He follows her out, right, as two smartly dressed chits of the maidservant class pass from right to left (This through traffic takes place behind the benches)

SECOND MAID Oh, come along, Daisy I'm tired

FIRST MAID Well, I'm warmer now I think we can go Almost as good as Woolworth's, isn't it ?

SECOND MAID (*assenting*) 'M Only that there's nothing to look at

[A HONEYMOON COUPLE, *simple and earnest, come in from the left, he with guide-book*

MR HONEYMOON (*reading*) The most interesting thing in the room is "The Laughing Woman," one of René Latour's most satisfying works Where's that?

[*They both look round the walls, expecting a painting*

MRS HONEYMOON I see women doing almost everything but laughing

MR HONEYMOON Well, this is room ten, and it says it's here

MRS HONEYMOON Perhaps it's gone since that book was printed

MR HONEYMOON But they don't sell things out of national collections

MRS HONEYMOON No, but perhaps they change them over You know, so as to— (*Her eye lights on the head, and is passing over it when she realises what she is looking at*) There it is ' It's a statue

MR HONEYMOON (*referring again to the book*) Yes So it is (*They come down to examine it*) She is laughing, too, isn't she? Laughing proper (*Their faces, which have been serious and a little tired with all this honeymoon promenading, grow radiant as they look at it*)

MRS HONEYMOON (*giving the arm she is clinging to a squeeze*) Nice, isn't it? I wonder what she was amused at?

[*After a moment they move on, taking their eyes away from the head reluctantly*

(*As they go out*) What would a sculptor get paid for that, Bill?

MR HONEYMOON (*considering*) Oh, I dunno 'Pends if it was ordered or not and if—

[*They are out of earshot*

After a pause voices are heard right and the ATTENDANT comes back talking with a REPORTER, who is jotting down notes

REPORTER (*repeating*) Not later than the fifteenth century Thanks very much (*Slapping his pocketed notebook*) That's my article finished Quite busy here to-day, aren't you?

ATTENDANT Yes The cold weather It drives them in like flies

REPORTER No illusions, you chaps, have you? Worse than head waiters (*His glance lighting on the shapeless bundle on the seat*) Get many of that kind here?

ATTENDANT No, not many But it isn't the cold with her She's a regular (*As the REPORTER looks surprised*) Yes Comes every afternoon and sits there Never does anything Just sits

REPORTER (*scenting a story*) Know anything about her?

ATTENDANT Not a thing

REPORTER (*touching his forehead*) Harmless

ATTENDANT That's it

REPORTER Well, thanks for the information——

[They move out together, left]

FADE OUT

ACT I

SCENE I

A small sixth floor room in a cheap apartment house in Paris in the year 1912 It is furnished with the old fashioned or maimed rejections from the rest of the house, is neglected and untidy, and is obviously the abode of someone whose interest in it is merely as a place to sleep and shelter The only tidy things in the room are the stacks of drawing portfolios and canvases

After a pause there is the sound of two people coming up the stairs and there enter RENÉ LATOUR and INGRID RYDMAN RENÉ is very young, about nineteen, small, thin, dark, half starved looking but alive with an almost disconcerting vitality, quick and vivid as a lizard INGRID's age to an onlooker is doubtful, she has probably looked like that for years and will continue unchanged for years to come Vaguely over thirty, actually thirty eight She has a wide, finely cut mouth, cheeks hollowed a little below the cheek bone, and eyes that have an expression half searching, half apprehensive Her clothes are neat, unfashionable but well cut, and she is carefully groomed A complete contrast to RENÉ, who is untidy, unwashed and very frayed RENÉ talks quickly, INGRID slowly, searching for the words

RENÉ There you are ! Not much to look at, is it ? But the rent is paid

INGRID You must be very glad when the lift is working

RENÉ Oh, even when it is working ! only comes to the fifth floor And if the concierge sees me coming it is never working She hates me, Madame Grumier

INGRID Why should she hate you ?

RENÉ Lots of people do They say I look

wicked But that is better than being dull Sit down You are tired with all those stairs Let me take your hat off

INGRID (*sitting down, a little dismayed by the dust which flies out of the cushions as he pats them*) No, I am not going to stay

RENÉ You must rest for a little Besides it is an ugly hat And your head is beautiful (*Takes off her hat gently and expertly and puts it aside*) I let you walk far too far, we were talking so hard I didn't notice There! It is four weeks to-morrow since I first saw you in the reading-room, and now you are here I can't believe it

INGRID You are glad?

RENÉ Glad! Do you know that last week I made up my mind that I would not stay in this beastly town a moment longer, that I should go to Munich, or Rome, or back to England—anywhere that I should not see you, should not have to think of meeting you? And then you let me speak to you, and walk with you Why did you refuse to notice me?

INGRID You are so young

RENÉ What has that to do with it? I'm me I could have murdered the men who sat next to you If you had been kind to them I should have died But you are very cold You smile and are pleasant and they all hope and then poof! that is all You are not interested in men?

INGRID Not very much, I think

RENÉ That big fair German who reads philology, he would like to sleep with you

INGRID Yes, I know I did think about it But I did not like the idea much He does not need me myself Another woman would do

RENÉ I need you

INGRID Yes, I think you do (*Looking round the*

room) Very much I think you do Have you no family

RENÉ (*scornful*) Oh my family ! Yes, I have the usual amount My father, he works with his hands but is he proud of it ? No ! He says,

You, Rene, my son, will be something better You are clever and win scholarships, therefore you will wear a black coat and nice little black trousers with white stripes, and go to an office every morning Not me ! I work with my hands, too

INGRID Black trousers with white stripes are very nice It is silly to despise them

RENÉ It is a symbol of a tribe I am not of any tribe Neither are you That is why we liked one another Did you know why I wanted to work next to you ?

INGRID I thought you were curious about what I studied

RENÉ Yes But most I wanted to talk to you The little Slav with the whiskers, he didn't like being done out of his place

INGRID I like Slavs I am half Slav myself

RENÉ What is your other name ?

INGRID Ingrid

RENÉ Ingrid Rydman (*Refusing it*) No Very hard Like a—a frying pan Froken is prettier

INGRID But Froken is just how you say Mademoiselle in Swedish Froken Rydman—Mees Rydman

RENÉ All the same, it is a pretty word, Froken I shall continue to call you that

INGRID (*amused*) Very well, monsieur (*When she twinkles she looks quite a young girl*)

RENÉ Rene

INGRID René

RENÉ And we shall talk nothing but English when we are together That is agreed, 'm ? So that the other fools shall not know what we say And so that when you write your book in English it shall not sound as if you were thinking in Swedish

INGRID Don't you think in French still ?

RENÉ A little, maybe But I talk very good English Have you been in England ever ?

FROKEN (INGRID) No I shall go there to write my book when I have finished my study in Paris

RENÉ Are you never going back to Sweden, then ?

FROKEN I think not I was very unhappy there It is a long time—and there is no one there I like much The only letter I get from Sweden is from my banker

RENÉ Bourgeoise !

FROKEN It is only a very little cheque

RENÉ Oh, well, you have beaten me That is the only thing in the world that René Latour cannot draw—a cheque

FROKEN You promised to show me your drawings

RENÉ Yes, of course They are not very exciting, perhaps, for a stranger to look at I have not often money for paint, so they are mostly black and white Line is more fascinating than colour, anyhow

FROKEN (*as he is unfastening the portfolio*) So this is where you live

RENÉ Yes It is a little dark, and not very comfortable

FROKEN You don't do much to make it comfortable It is very untidy

RENÉ Is it ? Yes, I suppose so I am not very tidy, I m afraid I work until I have to run to be in time at the classes I make my bed, usually That is all

FROKEN (*looking at the crumpled and obviously pulled together state of the bed*) Yes ?

RENÉ (*showing her drawings*) There You see, they are just quick sketches, most of them That is a good one

FROKEN Yes, that is clever (*Picking up another*) Who is that ?

RENÉ That is my little sister

FROKEN (*making a statement*) You like her

RENÉ How did you think that ?

FROKEN You drew her as if you liked her

RENÉ (*as who should say, "One little girl is just like another"*) Oh, she is just a little girl (*Discarding another*) That is bad (*Producing one from another portfolio*) What do you think of that ?

FROKEN (*doubtfully*) It is very—(*she searches for a word*)—woolly

RENÉ Woolly ! But that is—— (*He stops suddenly and suddenly laughs*) Oh, but you are right, quite right ! It is an imitation, that I tried to do it in the style of someone else And it is bad, bad (*He tears it across*) You are going to be very good for me

FROKEN (*looking at the torn pieces*) You could have used the back

RENÉ So I could Oh, you are going to be very good for me !

FROKEN It sounds—not too pleasant Like a medicine, perhaps Is that what I am to you ?

RENÉ You are—everything Excitement Comradeship Rest

FROKEN Am I ? (*She puts out her hand for the first time and passes it lightly over his hair*)

RENÉ It is a long time since anyone did that

FROKEN My little René

RENÉ You think I am a boy, to be petted But I am the strong one of us two

FROKEN You are just a baby

RENÉ All the same, it is so You need looking after more than I do I know what I shall do with my life

FROKEN And do I not ? Is there not my book to be written ?

RENÉ Yes, of course But——

FROKEN (*having caught sight of a drawing*) That is me ! (*She pulls it out of the pile*)

RENÉ Yes, that is you

FROKEN What was I laughing about ?

RENÉ It was the day the German sat on his sandwiches

FROKEN Oh, yes I remember

RENÉ I ve waited for days to see you laugh When you do, it is like a stone thrown into a still pool—all lights and little waves You should laugh oftener

FROKEN There is not much in life to laugh about Is that the only one of me ?

RENÉ Goodness, no My notebooks are nearly all you Some day I shall carve you in stone for all the world to see That is what I want to be A sculptor That is what I shall be We shall grow famous together, 'm ? Always there to help each other (*Touching the torn paper with his toe*) And criticise I shall say, ' Oh, Froken, my dear, what a vile phrase ' and you will say, " René Latour, as a carving that piece of stone means nothing whatever '

FROKEN What I should very likely say is
'René, have you made your bed this morning?' "

[There is a loud knock on the door, and, without waiting for an answer, MADAME GRUMIER comes in A formidable person She stands there in the open doorway, arms akimbo]

MADAME Ah-ha !

RENÉ (*furious*) Qu'est-ce-que vous venez fichier ici sans être priée, hein ?

MADAME Ah-ha !

RENÉ Il ne s'agit pas d'ah ha Sortez illico Vous n'avez rien à chercher ici Je paye mon loyer, et l'appartement est à moi

MADAME Tu paye ton loyer, mon petit, mais ça ne veut pas dire que tu aie permission d'entretenir ici des filles Renvoie moi cette femme, entends tu ? Et tout de suite ! C'est du joli—traiter la maison de bordel pour s'épargner quelques sous !

RENÉ Évidemment vous ne vous connaissez pas en honnêtes femmes Ça ce comprend

FROKEN (*rises*) What is it, René ? Does she want me to go ? (*Crosses to window*)

RENÉ Et si je croyais qu'elle comprenait la moitié de vos saletés je vous aurais flanquée à la porte D'ailleurs—est-ce-que j'ai l'habitude d'amener ici des femmes ?

MADAME Est-ce-que je sais, moi ? Mais cette fois, en voilà une Je sais bien ce qu'ils veulent, les étudiants, quand ils amènent une femme chez eux C'est pas pour faire la causette, hein ?

[Turns to door]

RENÉ (*pushing her out of the door, beside himself*) Sortez ! Ta geule ! Sortez—ah, salope ! Va encanailler tes semblables

MADAME (*a little daunted by his vehemence*) Je sors je sors mais renvoyez la, ou vous apprendrez de mes nouvelles Je defends—

[RENÉ bangs the door

FROKEN She was not pleased that I am here I must go

[*Collects her things from bed*

RENÉ You will not go ! She is a horrible woman She has a mind like a rubbish-pit They all have minds like that here They think of nothing but food and money and sleeping I shall leave this damnable country and its damned people I shall go back to England where they know what friendship is Yes, to England ! We shall go together

FROKEN I ? But I cannot go to England yet My study is not finished

RENÉ (*with his instinctive understanding of her*) Oh, if you keep on studying you will never write your book

FROKEN But that is nonsense If my book is to be good—

RENÉ Very well, you can study in London They have a museum there that is ten square miles big, and books bursting out at the windows Oh, come, Froken, come with me ! We can t go different ways now, just when we have found each other

FROKEN But to England—oh, no I cannot go I am not ready I must stay here for another six months, perhaps a year

RENÉ To day when you let me speak to you, was it just curiosity ?

FROKEN No No, I liked you You looked eager—and unhappy

RENÉ You were just stroking a stray cat, 'm ?

FROKEN No, no Not like that at all You—(*she presses her hand to her breast*)—moved me here

RENÉ But you will say “Good bye, René,” and go down those stairs quite happily although we shall never see each other again

FROKEN You don t have to go to England

RENÉ Yes, I do I hate this country I can’t work here any longer In England I am happy and can work

FROKEN But—I have no one in England

RENÉ You are going to England some time, aren t you ? If you come now, you will have me We could live together

FROKEN (*sharply*) Oh, no !

RENÉ (*exasperated*) Not like that, silly Haven’t you understood a word of all I have said this afternoon while we walked ? I do not think of you like that To those others you are a woman, yes An attractive one, too, perhaps (*He outlines with his finger the shape of her mouth*) It is a nice curve, that But to me you are (*he searches for a word that will explain*) a person Another person like myself Someone I love and admire as I would—oh, not a saint, perhaps , that is too distant , but——

FROKEN As you would your mother ?

RENÉ No, my sister, I think (*Pleased with a new idea*) Let us be brother and sister We can live together like that

FROKEN But that is crazy

RENÉ But it is not ! Always you think every new idea is crazy We might easily have been brother and sister In fact, we are Your mother married Rydman, who lived in Stockholm and sold wood And when her husband died she came to France and married Georges Latour

who lived in Dijon and built houses, and there she had me It is very simple

FROKEN (*misgiving*) You tell very easy lies

RENÉ Of course To have imagination it is to lie Don t you tell lies ?

FROKEN No

RENÉ Then that is one to be going on with Froken, my dear, dear Froken, why do you not want to come, when we have been so happy to day ? Is it that you do not trust me ? Or is it that because I am poor you are afraid that I shall be a drag on you ? I do not have to wait for cheques I earn my own living Anywhere in the world I can earn my living I keep myself since I am sixteen I don t need anyone s—

FROKEN No, no You don t understand It is that I don't want to—to complicate my life (*Fumbling for words*) People—they cling to one, they tear at one s heart There is no peace when one cares All my life I have tried to get free from the—grief that caring brings one Now that I have done it I don t want to—you see—?

RENÉ But you are lonely You said you were

FROKEN Everyone is lonely That is not suffering To be lonely does not tear one a thousand ways, does not— Oh, if you understood Swedish I could explain, perhaps

RENÉ It is clear enough You are afraid that I should be a disturbance in your life

FROKEN Not you What I should feel for you Now I must go

RENÉ No, not yet

FROKEN (*collecting rest of her things from bed*) That woman may come back I should only get you into trouble

RENÉ Your only aim in life seems to be to keep out of trouble

FROKEN (*putting on her hat*) Yes That is the beginning of middle age

RENÉ And because people have made you unhappy you think the only happiness is being alone !

FROKEN For me it is

[In the process of collecting her hat and wrap she picks up, in her automatic tidiness, two socks which are lying, separately, on the floor She runs her hand, again automatically, through the first before folding them together Her hand goes straight through the hole which is the heel The other is even worse]

RENÉ Very well, let us go to England separately But you come now, too, so that we can see each other sometimes, so that we——

FROKEN Who mends your clothes for you ?

RENÉ What ? Oh, I just wear them until they get too bad So that we can encourage each other No one will understand us as we understand each other , you must see that What we have most in common is the desire to make what is in us better and better

FROKEN Have not most people that ?

RENÉ I have not noticed it I won't bother you when you are tired No, nor borrow from you either !

FROKEN (*with a small reproving smile*) Oh, Rene, how you *hate* my little cheque !

RENÉ (*surprised and happy*) Froken ! You'll come, will you ? Will you ?

FROKEN (*slowly*) I shall think about it

CURTAIN

SCENE II

A small room in London six months later Because it has a north light and happens to be in an artists colony, it is called a studio Actually it is a back room in a more or less decrepit house Left is the door to the passage Back right, a door, to a small cupboard like apartment which does duty as a kitchen Right, the window The furniture is of the scantiest A bed, a table, one camp chair, one kitchen chair, and a coal scuttle are the salient articles

As the curtain goes up INGRID, hereinafter known as FRIK, is standing at the door, purse open in her hand, conversing with the WASHERWOMAN who is delivering the laundry—a very small parcel

FRIK But one and tenpence seems a very great deal for such a little little washing

WASHERWOMAN I'm charging you the regular prices What with soap and fire and labour—try washing them at home for a little and see how you make out

FRIK I would wash them at home if we had the means But it is not easy, with just a gas ring

WASHERWOMAN Well, I'm charging you no more nor no less than what I charges other folks And to be honest with you, miss, them collars are not worth paying to be laundered It's just a shame to put out good——

FRIK Yes One and tenpence, did you say ?
(*She begins to collect the still unfamiliar coins from her purse*)

[*There are running steps on the stairs and RENÉ bursts in, radiant*

RENÉ Frik darling—— (*Turning to the WASHERWOMAN*) If it isn't Madame la Blanchisseuse ! (*Kisses her rapidly on each cheek*) Is it a good day for the suds, madame ? Or a bleaching day, perhaps ? Or a drying day ?

WASHERWOMAN Go along with you You artists think you can get away with anything

FRIK Rene, what has come over you ?

RENÉ Are you jealous because I embrace so charming a woman ? Very well I make you equal (*Embraces her*)

FRIK Rene, be sensible What is it ?

RENÉ What it is is that we are having a party

FRIK Are you crazy ? We don't know any people in London

RENÉ Oh, yes, we do Hundreds of people, thousands of people Is the kettle on ?

FRIK What have you been up to ? Who is coming ?

RENÉ (*pushing her towards the kitchen door*) Go and put the kettle on first Then I shall tell you all about it

FRIK But, René——

RENÉ Put the kettle on

[*Exit FRIK*

WASHERWOMAN Do I leave the washing, or not ?

RENÉ But of course you leave it Isn't that what you came to do ?

WASHERWOMAN I haven't been paid yet

RENÉ Oh, is that all ? (*Searches his pockets*) How much is it ?

WASHERWOMAN One and tenpence

[*He has not enough on his person and looks round for more Sees the purse on the table where FRIK has left it Takes out the required amount*

RENÉ (*paying her*) Do you do all that for one and tenpence ? But it is slavery

WASHERWOMAN Not arf it ain t Then you have to put up with being kissed before you get what s owing yer (*Exit*)

RENÉ (*going to kitchen*) *Eh bien*, we shall be clean if not wealthy

FRIK Did you pay her ?

RENÉ Yes I hadn't quite enough, but I made it up out of your purse

FRIK (*coming from kitchen with RENÉ*) Not enough ? But you have the change from the ink, haven t you ?

RENÉ No You see, I bought the buns (*He indicates the bag of buns which he has deposited on the table between his embrace of the WASHERWOMAN and his embrace of FRIK*) And I have bought something for the little sister in France (*Produces something from his pocket which he exhibits on his palm*) Little pieces of stick see ? (*Watches her anxiously as she inspects them in case she knows what they are*) A man was selling them at the street corner They are magic

FRIK Rene, are you crazy ? To spend your little little money on such nonsense Will you never learn ?

RENÉ You do not believe that they are magic ? Ah, but wait ! My Frik shall have one of the little sticks, in case she shall be jealous of the little sister in France

[*On the table is a half drunk glass of Russian tea*
RENÉ picks it up and drops one of the sticks into it

FRIK Rene, my tea !

RENÉ There will be more tea presently Besides, it is cold See, Frik ! See what happens !

FRIK (*interested in spite of herself*) A flower !

RENÉ Pretty and bright and surprising like a rainbow She will like that

FRIK (*resenting her own capitulation*) She may have seen such things before

RENÉ (*serenely confident*) No, she won't have

FRIK You always make true what you want to believe, René

RENÉ And you, my dear little Frik, you are always afraid of what doesn't exist So, between us, nothing can ever happen to us that we have not allowed for It is very convenient, that Oh, don't be angry, Frik They only cost two pennies Two pennies is not much to pay for magic, is it? Besides, we are going to have plenty money soon Guess who is coming!

FRIK How can I guess? The Prince of Wales, maybe

RENÉ Much better than that Smith!

FRIK Who is Smith?

RENÉ The Smith

FRIK (*incredulous*) You mean Smith, the poet?

RENÉ Yes, poet philosopher, man of letters, great man I was in Bennett's asking him to put the picture of the bridges in the window where people might see it, and Smith came in to have a picture framed He asked about the picture of the bridges and Bennett told him that it was mine

FRIK And did he buy it?

RENÉ I think he would have, but I asked him to come along and see the others

FRIK But, René how stupid Now he will come and look and probably not buy one at all

RENÉ On the contrary, he will buy several Besides, if I had let him buy the bridges he would have gone away and never thought another thing about René Latour Now he will come and see us He will see what I can do

And he will see you, and realise what a thoroughly respectable family I come of, and he will like you, and his wife will ask you to tea, and all will be very nice

FRIK All will not be very nice It is madness to ask anyone here To this place What will he think of it ?

RENÉ What is the matter with the place ? It is not very attractive certainly, but they know that we are poor they will not expect a palace

FRIK They ? Who is they ?

RENÉ He is bringing his wife and another woman He had to meet them at a cafe, so I said to come here for tea

FRIK Oh, René ! Oh, René, how could you ? How could you ?

RENÉ What is the matter now ?

FRIK (*indicating the room*) This Everything What made you ask them ? What made you ?

RENÉ But why shouldn't I ask them ?

FRIK Not here What will they think of us ? Living in a room like this No proper cups and saucers even

RENÉ Oh, what do the silly cups and saucers matter ? There is enough to eat and drink and pictures to look at That is all that matters

FRIK To you perhaps But not to others Certainly not to me You might have asked them some other day, so that I could have prepared for them

RENÉ Prepared ?

FRIK We could have done something There is all my nice linen lying in the box at the station If we had that they might not think that we are barbarian If you had only——

RENÉ (*in a burst*) Oh, but you are the complete horrible little bourgeoisie, then ! (*Imitating her*) My linen My cups and saucers My reputation What will they think ! Oh, you make me sick Here is the man you have admired so much The man whose words you quote all the time I tell him about you and the book you write And when he comes to see you, all you can think about is how to impress him with your tablecloths And if you don't put down the tea things there won't even be tea for them when they come

FRIK Did you tell him about my book ?

RENÉ Of course I did Do you think I am a complete egotist ?

FRIK I could have forgiven you forgetting that

RENÉ Well, I didn't I boasted about it

FRIK Oh, René Why did you do that ? You are always too emphatic

RENÉ I can do nothing right, it seems It is a comfort that I can at least draw

[*FRIK crosses to him and takes his head in her hands*]

FRIK I'm sorry, René But you are so childish in lots of ways

RENÉ (*amiably*) And in all the other ways *you* are childish So we are a pretty pair Let us not quarrel, Frik Not to day, when Fortune is just going to knock at that door Think what is coming Smith knows everybody But everybody ! He likes to help young artists And he liked my drawing He liked it well enough to come and see the others Perhaps he will let me model him That would be advertisement Hurry up and let's get tea ready (*As she fetches mugs from the kitchen*) Don't forget a plate for

the buns (*Beginning to unwrap his purchase*) They won't look their most beautiful on a tin plate, but we can pretend it is pewter and been in the family for generations Your family, of course Not mine We have nothing in our family but insanity

FRIK (*coming back with the mugs, seeing for the first time the four huge plain buns that he has brought*) Is that what you bought ?

[*They both lean on table*]

RENÉ Yes , they looked nice What is the matter with them ?

FRIK But they are enormous ! And only four of them

RENÉ (*looking a little ruefully at them*) I must have counted wrong But we can cut them in half

FRIK That way they will think that we are mean, or too poor to buy enough to go round

RENÉ (*taking a knife out of the drawer at the end of the table*) Do you have thoughts like that when you go out to tea ? What a very nasty woman you are

FRIK (*as he cuts the buns*) And we have only three mugs

RENÉ And the glass That makes four

FRIK But there are five of us

RENÉ Oh, well, I shan't have tea I shall be talking all the time I am going to show Smith the little carvings If he knew enough to know that the bridges drawing was good, he must see that these are much more good

FRIK What is he like—Smith ?

RENÉ Like—a rather nice bishop , if you can imagine that ! (*The fling is at bishops, not at FRIK*)

FRIK I must put on my other lace collar What are we going to do about seats ?

RENÉ Two can sit on the bed

FRIK You can't ask Smith to sit on the bed !

RENÉ I've no doubt he has sat on beds before now

FRIK It is too late to borrow—even if we knew anyone who would lend us—— Push the bed nearer the table while I change my collar
(*Both push bed broadside to table*)

[From under the bed she pulls a small and very shabby suitcase, from which she produces a lace collar She puts in the collar she has taken off and replaces the case]

RENÉ I shall show him the drawings of the sleeping tigers They are good, but he can have them for five shillings if he likes them It is best not to frighten him off to begin with

FRIK If he likes them you'll probably give them to him (*At mirror, fumbling with the brooch which ties her collar*) Oh, dear !

RENÉ Let me do that (*He ties the collar with the neatness and efficiency characteristic of every thing he does with his hands*) There ! You are a very beautiful woman Have I told you that before ? How much have you written to-day ?

FRIK (*off hand*) Oh, I don't know

RENÉ How much ?

FRIK It is your collar that should be changed Do you think there would be time ?

RENÉ No, there wouldn't

FRIK But——

[There is a knock at the door]

RENÉ There they are !

[He goes eagerly to the door while FRIK stands, almost paralysed by excitement, in the middle of the floor]

SMITH (*in precise slow voice*) We weren't sure that we had found the correct place. It is not very easy to identify, is it?

RENÉ (*pleased as a child and on his best behaviour*)
Come in, come in

SMITH This is my wife

[RENÉ bows

RENÉ Let me present my sister. I told you about her.

SMITH (*shaking hands*) Of course, of course. The lady who is writing a book on philosophy. This is my wife.

MRS SMITH (*to FRIK*) Very charming of you to have us.

[*The husband and wife have been followed into the room by HAZEL GRAHAM. She is about twenty two, good looking rather than pretty, intelligent, a little spoiled. Her clothes are her own adaptation of the current fashion—different enough to be individual, not different enough to be either dowdy or outré. Her manner is a mixture of shyness and determination. She is waiting now to be introduced.*

SMITH This is a very dear friend of ours—Miss Graham. Miss Graham is a daughter of Sir Cuthbert. (*As this produces no light on the faces of his hosts*) The famous surgeon, you know.

HAZEL (*annoyed at the snobbery which presents her as her father's daughter*) She also does a little scribbling on her own account.

RENÉ (*interested*) You write?

HAZEL Not very seriously, I'm afraid.

RENÉ (*not interested in dabblers*) Oh!

FRIK Won't you sit down?

[*There is a moment of hesitation as the visitors consider the rival merits of the kitchen chair, the wooden deck chair, and the bed.*

You will find everything very temporary—

HAZEL (*as neither MR nor MRS SMITH appear able to make up their minds*) Well, I have a weakness for upholstery May I sit here ? (*She sits on the bed*)

RENÉ (*offering the deck chair to SMITH*) This is a comfortable one

SMITH (*thinking that he will be more dignified on the kitchen chair*) You have this, my dear

[*His wife takes it*

RENÉ I can recommend it, I promise you I sleep on it often

SMITH Do you sleep here ? (*Meaning in the studio*)

RENÉ (*pointing*) No, in the kitchen Frik sleeps here

SMITH Frik ?

RENÉ My sister

FRIK If you will forgive me, I shall make the tea

[*Exit to kitchen*

MRS SMITH My husband was very pleased with your drawing (*She says it as to a kindergarten pupil, but RENÉ is too excited to notice*)

RENE Yes, it is a good drawing But I have lots more just as good When you have had tea, I shall show you

SMITH Do you know Jan Penna's work ? Very nice Very nice indeed ! A master of line, don't you think ? I met him at dinner last week Astonishingly young for so assured an artist But this is the day of the young (*He pauses for the appropriate protest*)

[HAZEL GRAHAM watches with amusement RENÉ's unconsciousness of the cue

Old fellows like us have to take a back seat (*As this still produces nothing*) It cheers me that your sister finds worth in the aged (*He is sixty*)

MRS SMITH You aren't in the least like brother and sister, are you ?

RENÉ We are not full brother and sister, you know Her father was Swedish and mine French I have been explaining to your husband But Frik and I, we agree about everything

MRS SMITH (*with no satiric intention but because that is her usual method of filling conversational gaps*)
How nice for you

FRIK (*coming back with the tea*) You will forgive that everything is like this We are looking for a proper home, but it is difficult to find what we want Every day we hope and every day we are disappointed

[RENÉ, *who has been looking interestedly at HAZEL GRAHAM, looks at FRIK with amused appreciation at that*

MRS SMITH How sad for you !

SMITH There s a very charming place in Tring Street The studio that used to be Ryder s Quite reasonable, too About eighty a year, I believe

FRIK We might look at that Do you take milk, Mrs Smith ?

MRS SMITH Please

RENÉ (*the devil entering into him*) We do not want to take just anything, you know We should like a garden And electric light, of course And central heating, if possible And a quiet neighbourhood, that is very essential With a view, perhaps

SMITH (*laughing*) You may get such perfection, but you will have to pay for it

RENÉ My sister doesn t consider money Her father left her half Sweden

FRIK My brother likes to make jokes (*In appeal to the mocking RENÉ*) Be quiet, René

RENÉ We don't usually mention it Money in such bulk is embarrassing, is it not ? And it is so awkward for me, too Me, I have not a sou, so I work my fingers to the bone so that I may be able to put butter on my toast, and not feel that I am eating the bread of shame And so that I may be able to pay for the doormat Every place we go I always pay for the doormat

HAZEL (*enjoying him*) Go on—why ?

RENÉ So that I can say I will not have that fellow on my doormat again It is my only privilege

FRIK (*offering the buns*) We did not have very long notice of your coming, or our hospitality would be greater

[MRS SMITH takes a half bun, but MR SMITH, almost in the act of taking one, pauses and changes his mind]

SMITH I won't eat, thank you

MRS SMITH (*hastily*) My husband has to be very careful

[HAZEL takes one with a well intentioned but too marked readiness]

RENÉ I should like to show you——

SMITH (*to FRIK, who has taken her glass of tea*) I hear from your brother that I have admirers in Sweden

FRIK (*pleased as a young girl in a teacher's presence*) Oh, a very great number There is no name in Sweden so revered as yours in literature

SMITH I find that very gratifying to my vanity This is excellent tea

FRIK Since I was a young girl I have loved your books

SMITH Yes ? Which especially do you like ? Have you read *The Bridge below the Inn* ?

FRIK Yes But most I liked *To-morrow is Yours*
Five times I have read that It is a masterpiece
And your poem 'The Two Angels,' that is for
all time a wonder and an inspiration

SMITH You make me very happy Excellent
tea Your brother tells me that you are very
clever, that your book is going to make a
sensation

FRIK Oh, René always talks like that

HAZEL (*to RENÉ*) Won't you show me your
drawings?

RENÉ (*seriously*) Do you know anything about
drawing?

HAZEL Try me If I don't prove intelligent
you can stop at any time

[RENÉ *begins to show her his work, with growing
enthusiasm as her comment shows that she is not
ignorant of the subject*

MRS SMITH *crumbles as much as possible of her
bun into her cup and appraises the room*

SMITH (*still talking to FRIK*) If I can help you at
any time in the writing of it, I shall be delighted

FRIK That is very kind of you

SMITH Not at all, not at all I like to help
young people to find their feet We artists owe
that to each other the understanding that the
outsiders cannot give us They supply the bread,
but it is to each other that we must look for wine

FRIK Yes, that is so true, and beautifully put
I shall always remember that you said that to
me

HAZEL (*busy over the drawings with RENÉ*) —at
the Jardin des Plantes I know, at the gate
nearest the river Oh, but that is wonderful I
have never seen anything so alive

[SMITH, *who has had no intention of looking at*

RENÉ *s stuff for some time yet, looks round and is annoyed that he has been forestalled*

SMITH Hazel seems to have forestalled me in the private view

FRIK Won't you have more tea?

SMITH Thank you, but I think not. I must see this young man's drawings

HAZEL (*as SMITH moves to them, to FRIK*) May I have another bun, Mademoiselle Latour

FRIK (*pleased*) But of course (*Hands them to her*) And my name is Rydman

HAZEL Is it? No one told me. I'll remember in future (*She smiles in friendly fashion*) Your brother has genius, hasn't he? I have never seen anything like those tigers. Just lines, and the thing is alive

SMITH (*who has been examining the drawings*) Are all your drawings of animals?

RENÉ No. So many are animals, first, because they are more beautiful than people, and, second, because they are free models. To draw people one must pay, usually

SMITH There is your sister—a very charming woman

RENÉ Oh, yes. I still like to draw her, of course. But I know every bit of her body so well that I could draw her in my sleep

MRS SMITH (*with an air of going gallantly into the breach*) Don't you find it cold here without a fire, these days?

FRIK (*unaware that there is a breach, but very conscious that MRS SMITH is being critical*) We are very little in the studio. I work at the Museum, and Rene is at the office all day. And then very often we find that the charwoman has forgotten to bring the coal up from the basement

MRS SMITH How sad for you How long have you been here ?

FRIK Just a fortnight

RENÉ (*to SMITH*) But when I have made enough money to give up translating business letters for eight hours a day, I shall do nothing but sculpture

SMITH See that you get a large studio then How long have you been here ?

RENÉ Six months

[*MRS SMITH starts, looks at FRIK, who avoids her eye, and tries to exchange glances with HAZEL, who has heard both conversations, but finds her eye avoided for the second time*

(*Showing stuff to SMITH*) That is one of the best things I have ever done

SMITH I am not greatly interested in animals

[*RENÉ looks at him to see whether he can really be serious*

MRS SMITH (*going to the group at the drawings*) Eustace, I think it is time we were going

SMITH But, my dear——

MRS SMITH (*firmly*) The Randolphs are coming, you know (*With meaning*) I think we must go

[*It is obvious to SMITH that something is very wrong*

RENÉ (*rises*) But you haven't seen the best If you don't like the drawings, look at these (*He shows them two small sculptures in stone*) These will show you what I can do

SMITH Very youthful and mannered, my dear young friend The endearing affectations of adolescence But if you have ambitions as a sculptor you should work on a larger scale It is bad to niggle At that size your work becomes bric à brac

RENÉ (*taking them back from him*) I see I have made a mistake

SMITH (*blissfully unaware of his meaning*) Ah, well, you are young, my friend We all make mistakes when we begin Acknowledging them is half the battle

MRS SMITH If you are ready, Eustace——

SMITH Yes, yes, my dear, we must go Thank you both for letting us come A most enjoyable half hour And an excellent cup of tea, made *moiselle* You can tell your friends that E A R Smith said so Some day I shall read your book, I hope And I shall say I had tea with her once, a charming woman , and I shall feel duly puffed up and superior Good bye (*To RENÉ*) I shall drop into Bennett s to morrow or the next day and have another look at the bridges Come along, my dear Come along, Hazel

[*They take their leave* MRS SMITH *coldly*, HAZEL GRAHAM *apologetically*

The door closes upon them, leaving RENÉ and FRIK without words

RENÉ (*after a pause*) He would have been impressed with your tablecloths, after all (*He begins to put the drawings together*) I don t much care for animals” Oh, well ! He is Welsh What could one expect ?

FRIK But he is the great man of the English

RENÉ None of the English great men are English The English are too modest to become great men Oh, well, we have the buns (*He takes one from the plate and offers the rest to her as he begins to eat it*)

FRIK No, I can t eat

RENÉ (*shaking the plate*) Go on They are notable buns, these , they have been refused by an O M

FRIK How can you be so cheerful, René ?

RENÉ Am I to commit suicide because a silly old man didn't like my work ?

FRIK No, but you counted so much on this
And now we are back again where we were
And I think it is a little my fault I mean that
Mrs Smith took him away I told a lie about—
about——

RENÉ (*amiably*) If you are going to make a
recitation to me of all the lies you told this
afternoon, I am going out to walk in the park
Eat your bun And smile, Frik You haven't
laughed for two days

FRIK There is not much to laugh at

RENÉ You always say that Think of Smith
going to bed

FRIK Well ?

RENÉ With his false teeth out and his night
shirt on

FRIK How do you know that he wears a night-
shirt ?

RENÉ Of *course* he wears a nightshirt And
he looks under the bed for burglars What else
does he do ?

FRIK (*viciously*) He—— (*She does not know the
word for it, so gives an imitation*)

[RENÉ, *after watching for a moment, identifies the
process with a delighted shout*

RENÉ Gargles ! Of course he gargles And
when he does it he looks just like a hen (FRIK
joins in his delight)

[*There is a knock at the door*

(*In a cheerful shout, waving his bun*) Come in

[HAZEL GRAHAM *comes in apologetically Sur-
prise wipes the smile from both faces* RENÉ gets

to his feet FRIK *tries to hide the fact that she is eating*

HAZEL I'm so sorry to bother you, but I left my scarf

[The scarf cannot be found]

Perhaps it fell down behind the bed

RENÉ Yes, here it is *(Crosses over to her with it)*

HAZEL *(standing in the doorway preparing to go)*
I wanted to say that if you really are hard up for a model well—would I do?

RENÉ How much?

HAZEL I don't understand

RENÉ How much money do you want?

HAZEL Oh, just for love

RENÉ For love?

HAZEL *(hastily)* In English, "for love" means 'for nothing'

RENÉ *(delighted)* What a very English idiom!

HAZEL As a matter of fact, I think my father would commission a bust if I asked him. I liked your little sculptures so much, and I think *he* would. He has very good taste in art generally, and he knows quite a lot about it.

RENÉ Isn't your father a surgeon?

HAZEL Yes, but he takes out only the best literary appendices

RENÉ Yes?

HAZEL So—may I come and sit for you? I you really want a model!

RENÉ Which of the statuettes did you like best?

HAZEL The cat curled up, I think

RENÉ (*giving it to her*) I should like you to have it

HAZEL Oh, but I couldn't—

RENÉ Please, I should like you to And on Tuesday night you come and I make sketches for a bust Yes?

HAZEL Yes Good-bye again Thank you for this, and for the tea, and everything

[Feeling that in her emotion she has reverted deplorably to the schoolgirl, she beats a retreat]

RENÉ There! That is the English for you I told you they were nice

FRIK She was being kind I won't be pitied by anyone

RENÉ When people are not interested you complain, when they are interested you are furious

FRIK I won't be pitied by anyone

RENÉ Have another bit of bun Frik, let us have a fire

FRIK You know we have no coal

RENÉ Perhaps not, but we have two books of Mr Smith's

FRIK But—

RENÉ They have six hundred pages each—that is one thousand and two hundred pages Think of the blaze

FRIK (*doubtful*) But they are good books

RENÉ (*imitating SMITH*) And some day I hope I shall read your book, and I shall say I had tea with her once, a charming woman and I shall—

FRIK (*getting the books from her suitcase*) Oh, yes, let us make a bonfire We will light the first

fifty pages, and then add the rest, a page at a time That will keep it going a long time Here ' (*She gives him one book*) You tear that one Wine, indeed ! At least we shall get warmth from him

RENÉ sings ' *Marlbrouck s'en va t-en guerre* ' as he tears, laughing

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE I

The scene is the same, some weeks later

HAZEL GRAHAM *is sitting on the kitchen chair, and RENÉ is employed in modelling her in clay The bust is nearing completion It is a Saturday afternoon in late spring, cold and misty*

HAZEL (*concluding a story*) So he took what they offered and agreed to forget all about his Luxembourg ambitions Which was the wisest thing he could have done Don't you think so ? (*As he doesn't answer*) 'M ?

RENÉ (*indifferently*) Oh, yes (*He goes on with his work without pause*)

HAZEL I don't believe you've heard a word I've been saying

RENÉ Oh yes, I have

HAZEL What was it about then ?

RENÉ Yourself

HAZEL That is a safe guess, you think ? So that is your opinion of me A self-centred ninny ? (*After a pause*) You know, I've sat to several people in my time, but you are certainly the strangest

RENÉ Because I don't make love to you ?

HAZEL (*protesting*) No, of course not

RENÉ I am sorry to be dull, but I don't love anyone but Frik

HAZEL Your sister ?

RENÉ Yes

HAZEL She's ridiculously devoted to you, isn't she ?

RENÉ Why is it ridiculous ?

HAZEL It's strange altogether that you should

care so much for each other You have so little in common

RENÉ (*stopping his work*) Little in common !
(*Restraining his outburst*) What do you know about it ?

HAZEL I don't know I observe

RENÉ (*rudely*) You observe, do you ? The person who thought the moon was green cheese, he also was an observer Keep your chin up What are you blushing for ?

HAZEL Your concentrated stare is embarrassing

RENÉ I should stare just as hard if you were a skeleton You have nice bones

HAZEL I shouldn't mind if I were a skeleton

RENÉ Well, when you come again, pretend that you are a skeleton It is good for everyone to think of themselves like that

HAZEL (*after a pause*) Mademoiselle Rydman hasn't gone out because I was coming, has she ?

RENÉ I don't suppose she even remembered you were coming She has gone shopping

HAZEL How is her book progressing ?

RENÉ (*pausing before his answer, because he is interested in what he is doing—out of his absorption*) Oh, she will never do anything

HAZEL (*astounded*) Never do—— ! Do you mean that she has no—— ?

RENÉ (*retrieving hastily*) I mean that she will never be persuaded to give up house cleaning and attend to her talent

HAZEL Oh, I see I thought for a moment—— But she is very clever, isn't she ?

RENÉ She is a genius

HAZEL I don't want to I have to

RENÉ All you have to do is tell her what you want to eat, isn't it ?

HAZEL You don't "tell" our kind of cook you consult her

[Enter FRIK, with parcels]

Good afternoon, mademoiselle

FRIK Good afternoon, Miss Graham (*She puts a paper bag on the table, keeping the other parcels to carry to the kitchen*)

HAZEL Lovely weather

FRIK I think it is very cold

HAZEL Yes, for so late in the spring, perhaps But I love cold weather Muffin time is the nicest time of the year

FRIK (*going to the kitchen*) For those who can afford butter

HAZEL (*to RENÉ*) I must go The hour is more than up

FRIK (*reappearing*) I forgot The postman gave me a letter for you

RENÉ (*dying to look at the letter, but furious with FRIK because of her bad manners*) Very well Put it on the table

FRIK It is something official

RENÉ Official !

HAZEL Your sins have found you out

[RENÉ, without apology, rips the envelope open

HAZEL is getting into her fur coat FRIK stands anxiously waiting

RENÉ (*having read*) So that's it ! (*Flicking the paper with a furiously contemptuous hand*) Go on shouting, my friends I cannot hear you Burst your silly fat bodies with shouting I do not come

HAZEL What is it ?

RENÉ My *service* (*Burlesque*) The time has come that a good son of France should do his duty to his country (*Pretending to read*) On such and such a day, you, René Latour, will report yourself at such and such a place, and you will be given a very nice lousy uniform, and fed on excellent swillings from the best hotel kitchens, and you will spend your days lying on your stomach shooting at little targets so that all the fat bourgeoisie of France can sleep confidently in their beds *Sâles types* !

HAZEL Are you not going to do your service, then ?

RENÉ Waste my precious time lying on my stomach when there is so much waiting for my hands to do ? I should be crazy

HAZEL But if you don't, you can never go back to France

RENÉ Who wants to go back to France ? Have I not just got free of it ? (*He tears the letter into little bits*)

HAZEL Do you hate France, then ?

RENÉ (*throwing the torn bits on the table*) Hate it, no ! (*Snapping his fingers contemptuously*) I do not care that for France

HAZEL (*considering him*) You spend a lot of energy on something you don't care that about (*Going*) Well, I am glad you are staying in England Next Saturday will finish the head, won't it ? And then we shall have it cast Do you like it, mademoiselle ?

FRIK I like everything that René does

HAZEL (*to RENÉ*) Three o'clock next week, then ?

RENÉ Yes, three o'clock And I shall buy a

bottle of wine and we shall drink to the damnation of all generals, colonels, and jack-in-offices generally, and to French ones in particular

HAZEL Yes ! Good bye, mademoiselle

FRIK Good bye

[Exit HAZEL]

RENÉ Must you be rude to my clients ?

FRIK I don't like her She is of the English who think they are natural lords of the earth

RENÉ She likes you She said you had genius

FRIK What does she know about genius ? And you were talking about me to her ?

RENÉ Yes What of it ?

FRIK I won't have you discussing me with her

RENÉ Discuss ? I would discuss anything with anyone

FRIK What kind of loyalty is that ?

RENÉ You talk a very great amount of non sense You are very silly sometimes, Frik

FRIK Is it silly to expect loyalty from you ? I would not discuss you with other people

RENÉ Why not ? I am very discussable And just because you have been fussing over your shopping and worn yourself out is no reason for coming in and being rude to my clients Do you think people are going to come here if you are rude to them ?

FRIK You are rude to people yourself often

RENÉ Yes, but they like my rudeness When I am rude, they laugh, but when you are rude they say, " Well, now I must be going "

FRIK And if I have been fussing over the shopping it is only because I have to find the cheapest of everything I walk half a mile for this and another half mile for that because there it is a penny cheaper than here

RENÉ But, Frik, you don't *have* to do that
We can't be so poor that you must wear yourself
out Do I not give you all my twenty-five shil-
lings every week ?

FRIK (*furious*) Which are you accusing me of
being—a thief or a fool ?

RENÉ (*flaring up*) You really—— (*Pausing, in his
natural tones*) Poor Frik, you are tired Let us
have tea You will feel quite, quite different
after tea (*He begins to help her take off her things*)
I have never known anyone who could get so
drunk on tea as you can Sit down there and I
shall put the kettle on (*As she begins to rise at
mention of the kettle*) No, sit still I shan't mess up
your kitchen Even such a difficult operation as
boiling a kettle I am quite equal to

FRIK (*as RENÉ goes to the kitchen*) You are
making fun of me, but I don't care You can
be very sweet, René

[*She lies still in the deck chair, while RENÉ lights
the gas with a loud explosion in the kitchen*]

RENÉ (*coming back*) What did you get for
tea ?

FRIK Look and see

RENÉ (*exploring the bag on the table*) Coffee buns
Oh, Frik, I love you You are an adorable
woman Have I told you that before ? (*Pausing*)
How far did you walk for these ?

FRIK What does it matter ? They are here

RENÉ True, they are here (*Putting mugs and
sugar on the table*) We will forget the pain and
think only of being happy (*Picking up the torn
letter and scattering it over her*) We will have a
festa all on our own That is all that is good for
confetti

FRIK You don't think they can do anything to
you, René ?

RENÉ Of course not What could they do ?

FRIK They could ask the English to send you back, perhaps

RENÉ You flatter me I am not yet so important

FRIK One is put in prison if one avoids *service* ?

RENÉ If one is foolish enough to be caught on French soil That is one thing that will never happen to me

FRIK The world is full of terrors, isn't it ? Terror of starvation, of being ill, of being trapped, of not being equal to what is asked of one——

RENÉ (*looking at the nearly completed bust*) When you have had your tea you will begin to count the glories

FRIK (*her mind on its own untracked wandering*) You must have a bath to night

RENÉ Have a bath ? Why ? I am quite clean I had one—oh, the other day When I can buy stone and be a sculptor and make a mess of myself and your nice tidy room, then I shall have a bath—oh, quite often

FRIK All the same, you will have a bath to night

RENÉ Oh, you are ten thousand tyrants and twenty thousand bullies

FRIK It is I who will heat the water, and it is I who will prepare the bath, and it is I who will empty the water and clear away And yet you make out that I am a——

RENÉ Oh, very well, Frik darling, I shall have the beastly bath Don't be distressed I shall even heat the water and I shall fill the bath and I shall pour it away afterwards (*After a pause*) And I shall put the soap back in the dish Now then ! And afterwards you shall read me what you have written this week

FRIK No, I am too tired to night

RENÉ Then to morrow morning

FRIK Perhaps

RENÉ Why perhaps ? (*As she is looking for an excuse*) You don't mean that you haven't written anything ? Again !

FRIK Why do you bully me ? It is my own business if I write or not

RENÉ No It was agreed that we were to work together Grow famous together And now you do nothing, week after week

FRIK How can I work here ? It is so cold that my brain grows numb

RENÉ You could stay in bed and write

FRIK And all day there is noise, noise, noise The garage man bangs and clatters and runs engines and sings and shouts orders, and children play and scream, and men play instruments——

RENÉ Then go somewhere else There is the whole of London, dozens of reading-rooms——

FRIK And who will keep the house clean if I go ?

RENÉ If you worry over little things like making the house clean, you will never do anything You have no sense of proportion, FriK To morrow the house will be dirty again, and the day after, and when you are dead You have only a little time—one little lifetime—to do all that is in you to do, and you *dust* !

FRIK I cannot work in the middle of dirt

RENÉ There is nothing to hinder you going to the museums every morning when I go to the office It is warm there, and quiet, and you could work there all day

FRIK And who is to cook for you, and wash for you, and mend for you——

RENÉ I lived very well before I ever saw you

FRIK You were a scarecrow At least I see that you have a clean collar

RENÉ Are you pretending to yourself that you cannot work because of me ?

FRIK (*quickly*) No, of course not, René

RENÉ Because that is not so You are making me an excuse for your own lack of resolution You don't want to work You would rather think, ' I *could* work, of course, if I were not so *affairé*,' and that excuses you from facing facts

FRIK How dare you say that to me ! You don't believe that I can write my book ?

RENÉ Of course I believe you can All I say is that you run away from the effort It is not easy—creation It is pain and ecstasy and striving You don't want that You would rather make notes in little books and say,

To-morrow I shall write a chapter Always it is to-morrow !

FRIK (*crying suddenly*) Oh, I must go away from here I must go away My thoughts go round and round There is no peace

RENÉ Don't cry, Frik Oh, don't cry I was bullying, but only because I love you Don't cry You worry and worry until things seem all black and dreadful There is nothing to worry about when we have each other——

FRIK Nothing to worry about ! How do you think we are to go on living ? Already we are in debt—for the rent

RENÉ But soon I shall be making lots of money It is going to be good, the bust of the Graham girl All her friends will see it and admire And they will come running to have portraits made Don't cry, Frik To-morrow is Sunday We shall steal sixpence each from the common

fortune and go into the country, where it is quiet and sunny and one can rest

FRIK How do you know it will be sunny ?

RENÉ Of course it will be sunny

FRIK Oh, how I hate your silly optimism ! To-morrow it will be sunny Next week we shall have a fortune Next month—next year I was a fool to give up my peace for a child like you A fool to leave Paris

RENÉ You don't mean that Take it back, Frik

FRIK I take nothing back In Paris I was happy, I had my study and my little cheque It was all I wanted And you took that from me——

RENÉ (*passionately*) That is not so ! I have not lived on your money Do I not sit at a desk for eight hours a day ?

FRIK How far do you think your office money would go if I were not here to buy for you, to bargain for you——

RENÉ I do not want you to buy or bargain for me ! It was not for your money that I wanted us to be together It was because in all the world there was no one who mattered like you Because you were beautiful and wise and exciting But you are just a silly old woman—always looking for slights, always worrying about things that don't matter, puffing yourself up with thoughts of how great you are, how clever, and doing nothing to make it true That girl said we had little in common and I begin to believe she is right

FRIK (*beside herself with anger*) She said that ! And you let her say it ?

RENÉ Yes, I let her say it Why not ? She is very intelligent , she has a right to her opinion

FRIK So that is how you talk together behind my back ? (*She is on her feet now*) Laughing about me She is everything that is intelligent, and I am a fool She is beautiful, and I am old and plain That is how it goes, isn't it ? Very well, go on laughing I cannot stop you But I will not live in a room with even the image of her ! (*She whips the damp cloth from the bust and sends it hurling from its pedestal*)

[RENÉ, after his first instinctive movement to save it, stays still

(*Sobered by the sight of the rather battered precious thing on the floor, penitent and frightened*) It isn't much hurt, Rene It isn't much hurt ! (*She moves to rescue it*)

RENÉ (*anticipating her*) No ? Then let me help (*In a cold fury, smiling, he stamps the clay into shapelessness*)

FRIK (*trying to prevent him*) Oh, no, René, no ! Oh, don't !

[*As she sees what is happening, she turns with a despairing cry and runs out of the room, banging the door after her*

RENÉ *has not anticipated this* He looks at a loss for a moment Then he remembers that if he leans from the window and looks to the left he can see her as she goes up the street He goes hastily to the window, opens it, and leans out He watches her in what apparently is neither anxiety nor anger—mere curiosity as to what she is doing—as she goes up the street

RENÉ (*coming away from the window, disgustedly*) No hat ! Now she will have rheumatism pains in her head and be quite unbearable

CURTAIN

The dining-room of the Grahams house in Queen Anne Street, some weeks later

An early summer evening, and a dinner party in progress About the round table are eight chairs, six occupied and two empty

Of the six people at table, the first is the host, SIR CUTHBERT GRAHAM, successful surgeon and amateur of the arts One feels, as one so often feels in the presence of successful doctors, that if his title had not come to him as a medical practitioner, it would have come to him as a successful actor-manager On his right is a vacant chair and beyond it sits O'BRIEN, editor of one of the more advanced London weeklies lean, tall, dark, plain, hungry looking Next him, LAURA GADD, author of one notorious novel and thereafter a famous writer of middles for the penny Press small, dark, spare, and quick, like an adder about thirty, smart and soignée quite aware of the real worth of articles entitled "Do Women Prefer Sons?" , born, in fact, with her tongue in her cheek On her right, BURCHED, the art critic plump, pink, sleek, well dressed and well fed, monocled Next him, HAZEL GRAHAM, looking very pretty and almost demure in a restrained evening frock On her right an empty chair, and beyond it MARION SLADE, painter of landscapes massive, masculine, careless of appearance, forty-five, almost totally without gestures, so that she looks like a sack of cement

Dinner is at the fish course The PARLOURMAID leaves the room as the curtain goes up

LAURA All the same, I'm terribly disappointed I told everyone that I was going to meet a wild man of the woods, and now I shan't have a single good story to tell about it

HAZEL Laura, you're disgusting Your only interest in people is to make a good story out of them

LAURA Well, *they* don't complain I write very good stories And, anyhow, everyone likes publicity nowadays Even the medical profession Don't they, Sir Cuthbert?

SIR CUTHBERT Not everyone, surely? Wasn't there a Lady Someone-or Other who made a row last year because she said you had——

LAURA (*waving her hands at him*) Now, now, don't rake up the exceptions The fact remains, if Hazel didn't keep one of the best cooks in London, I should feel that I'd been brought here under false pretences

MARION Personally, I feel a little relieved I heard such exceedingly strange reports of that couple that I had grave doubts, very grave doubts——

BURCHED Marion Slade, confess you're never really enjoying yourself except when you are having very grave doubts

O BRIEN Yes, her doubts are her sop to conscience Like the person who takes a third helping and says with shining eyes, "This is sheer greed!"

MARION What I *have* grave doubts about, if you must know, is your capacity as an art critic Last Friday you said in this man's rag (*she indicates O'BRIEN*) that my sky was staccato

BURCHED Well, so it was O'Brien agreed with me Didn't you?

O'BRIEN I don't remember the picture at all

MARION What! An Irishman running out of a fight?

LAURA He's not Irish, he's Ulster

SIR CUTHBERT (*laughing*) No, no! I can stand an art war, but not a political one The next person who mentions Ulster will be asked to leave Tell me, what horrors have you been

hearing about Hazel's latest protégés, Mrs Slade ?

MARION Well, Agatha Smith told me——

HAZEL (*contemptuously*) Oh, Mrs Smith !

MARION Agatha Smith told me that her husband had dragged her there one day, and she thought the ménage was very fishy altogether. The woman was a dreadful liar to begin with, she said.

BURCHED That shouldn't have worried Agatha Smith.

LAURA What was so fishy ?

MARION She said that in her opinion they were much too devoted for brother and sister.

HAZEL Is she insinuating that they are not brother and sister ?

MARION No, she seemed quite sure of that.

HAZEL What are you talking about ?

O'BRIEN (*interested*) No, really !

LAURA Well, I'm still sorrier that they haven't come.

BURCHED Is the woman beautiful ?

SIR CUTHBERT Mrs Smith's delightful speculations can hardly be called evidence.

LAURA Well, you tell us what a trained observer thinks of them, Sir Cuthbert.

SIR CUTHBERT I haven't even seen them. You forget that I'm a busy man. This is the first dinner I've eaten in London in the past fortnight.

LAURA Then Hazel is the only one who knows. Tell us, darling, what do you think ?

HAZEL I think that Mrs Smith ought to be shot.

LAURA Carried unanimously, my dear but tell us about your queer couple

HAZEL There isn't anything to tell, the way you mean They're just a very devoted brother and sister She is much older than he is——

O'BRIEN How old is she ?

HAZEL It would be difficult to tell

BURCHED Oh, as old as that

HAZEL And she mothers him and he adores her, and that is all there is to it

[The door, which is in the middle of the back wall, opens, and RENE comes in, holding the door open with a flourish for an embarrassed and scandalised PARLOURMAID, who is bearing a tray with the entrée FRIK appears in the background]

RENÉ *(to the MAID)* V la, mademoiselle *(To HAZEL)* The front door was open, so we just walked in

HAZEL I am so glad to see you Do come in *(Indicating the table)* We had given you up you see

[Shakes hands with FRIK]

This is my father

FRIK I am sorry we are so late We had to wait such a long time for——

RENÉ We would have been in time, only we were having a row

LAURA As Agatha Smith would say How sad for you !

HAZEL That is Laura Gadd, the journalist

LAURA Author, darling I may be sacked from the paper to-morrow morning, but I shall be an author till I die

HAZEL And this is Mrs Slade, who paints landscapes Will you *(to RENÉ)* sit beside Mrs Slade ? And you, mademoiselle, beside father ? *(Noticing that FRIK, though hatless, is wearing the*

jacket of her coat and skirt, apologetically) But you would like to take off your things, wouldn't you ?

FRIK Oh, no, thank you I left my hat in the hall We are sorry to be so much trouble (*She looks tired, excited, and flustered*)

BURCHED Do family rows detain you very often, mademoiselle ?

FRIK Oh, that is just René's way of making a joke

RENÉ (*to BURCHED*) You know how it is Frik wants me to wear one kind of tie and I want to wear just what I happen to be wearing, and poof ! before one knows we are at it I know who you are I have seen photographs of you

BURCHED I am very flattered But you are sure that you have guessed correctly ? You don't imagine I'm Winston Churchill, or someone like that, do you ?

RENÉ No, you are Burched, the critic I read an article you wrote in the *Vanguard* some weeks ago I liked it very much But you are wrong about the Greeks, you know Quite, quite wrong

BURCHED Really ?

RENÉ The Greeks can teach us nothing Their work is a complete negation of everything that makes sculpture a living force

BURCHED You should write an article for the *Vanguard* yourself

RENÉ I should like to

BURCHED Speak to Mr O'Brien about it He is the editor

RENÉ You are the editor ? I am delighted to meet you Your paper is the only intelligent one I have found in England

O'BRIEN (*ironic*) Thank you !

RENÉ But why do you have such poor drawings in it ?

O'BRIEN The drawings are by Jan Penna

RENÉ Yes, I know That is immaterial They are very bad (*To BURCHED*) Why do you laugh ? *You* must know that they are bad

BURCHED (*to O'BRIEN*) ' Out of the mouths of babes ' " (*To RENÉ*) I have been telling him for months that the drawings were dreadful, but he always knows best

RENÉ Let me do drawings for you instead of an article

O'BRIEN Suppose we discuss it after dinner, shall we ?

RENÉ Oh, yes, I forgot the English never discuss important things at meals

SIR CUTHBERT (*who has been attending to FRIK, helping her to wine, which she drinks thirstily*) I must come some day and see what you have made of my daughter Hazel is delighted with her head

RENÉ Yes, it is very good

SIR CUTHBERT It was bad luck that you had to do the work twice

LAURA Twice ? Did you have a trial run ?

RENÉ No, the first head had an accident

HAZEL You never told me just what happened to that first one

RENÉ It was very simple I was opening the window, like this (*he imitates the upward shove of a person opening a heavy window*), and just behind there was the table I push with all my might—oof!—and my behind pushes over the table, and the table pushes over the stand, and all in a moment the head is in the fireplace, in little pieces It was very sad !

[BURCHED, HAZEL and RENÉ continue to discuss his work

LAURA (*to* FRIK) You write, mademoiselle, don't you ? What is your line ?

FRIK Line ?

LAURA Yes, what do you write—novels ?

FRIK Oh, no I think novels are a degenerate form.

LAURA (*recovering*) They pay, though

FRIK I do not write to make money

LAURA (*sotto voce*) God !

FRIK All my life I have studied philosophy I write a book on that

LAURA How clever of you !

O BRIEN Have you got a publisher ?

FRIK Oh, no My book isn't written yet

O BRIEN Work like that is usually commissioned You'll find it difficult to place, I'm afraid

SIR CUTHBERT Don't be so discouraging, O'Brien Mademoiselle—— (*He can't remember her name*)

FRIK Rydman

SIR CUTHBERT Mademoiselle Rydman may be the genius of our age, for all you know

MARION Rydman ? Is your name not the same as your brother's ?

FRIK No We are not full brother and sister I am Swedish, not French

MARION Oh

FRIK (*answering the tone*) You find that remarkable ?

SIR CUTHBERT (*hastily*) What is remarkable is that there should be so much talent in one family

LAURA What is still more remarkable is how you manage to stay so devoted Genius is notoriously difficult, and two in one family—— !

FRIK You are pleased to make fun There was no mention of genius

LAURA My dear, only geniuses write without making money

SIR CUTHBERT At least, my daughter thinks your brother has genius She is never tired of singing his praises I am looking forward enormously to seeing his work

FRIK (*looking across to where RENÉ and HAZEL are in animated and intimate conversation*) Yes, René is very clever

MARION Hazel is looking very lovely to night What will you do, mademoiselle, when your small brother gets married ?

FRIK I shall be very glad (*She drains her second glass of wine*)

LAURA So you're not one of those females who hang on to their belongings ?

FRIK No I don't like responsibility I should be happy to see René married

[The stem of the wineglass she is holding snaps in her fingers]

Oh, I am so sorry ! So sorry !

SIR CUTHBERT Don't worry over that They are very easily snapped I did the same thing myself only the other night

FRIK (*to PARLOURMAID as a new glass is brought*) Please do not bring another I must not have any more wine

SIR CUTHBERT Oh, please do !

O'BRIEN Sir Cuthbert is very vain of his cellar, you know

FRIK A cellar ? What is notable about the cellar ?

[*The others laugh a little*]

MARION The wine in it

FRIK (*growing ever more confused and angry with herself and everyone*) I am very stupid, I'm afraid

SIR CUTHBERT It is we who are at fault for having evolved such a language We apologise

LAURA Are you writing your book in English ?

FRIK Yes To write in English is to speak to the biggest audience in the world

MARION Not if you write about philosophy The English speaking peoples are too busy practising philosophy to read about it You should write it in German

FRIK I thought of that, but I do not like the language

SIR CUTHBERT You speak German, too ? How many languages *do* you speak ?

FRIK Five And French—which I speak very badly

SIR CUTHBERT You marvellous woman !

FRIK I like better, you see, to read authors in their native tongues In a translation one so often loses the flavour of a book

LAURA Well, I've never felt so badly educated in my life !

FRIK I am sorry I make you feel that It was not intentional

LAURA (*turning to BURCHED, who is just turning away from his conversation with RENÉ and HAZEL*) Pay me compliments, quick

BURCHED What ?

LAURA Stay me with sweet sayings comfort me with flattery

BURCHED What is this? A new Song of Solomon?

LAURA Mademoiselle Rydman is so learned she makes me feel like a third form girl Be a friend and prop my vanity

BURCHED I cannot lie about your literary talent, dear lady, but I have always said—and I stick to it—that you are the best dressed—

LAURA Yes?

BURCHED Journalist in London

[The others laugh]

MARION You needn't go to him for comfort He is so used to crabbing pictures that crabbing is second nature to him

O BRIEN An occupational disease

HAZEL Is Mademoiselle Rydman so learned?
I didn't know

LAURA My dear, she reads everything in the originals the Koran, the Decameron, and the Book of Deer

BURCHED (*to RENÉ*) What language do you fight in, you two?

RENÉ Oh, French You can say worse things in French, in more different ways, than in any other language

BURCHED But French leaves your sister at a disadvantage

RENÉ She is always at a disadvantage when we fight I like fighting, and she hates it

HAZEL I wonder she doesn't just send you to bed She must have spanked you often when you were little

RENÉ Oh, no, we didn't know each other in those days

MARION Not know each other ! But aren't you——

FRIK I stayed in Sweden, with my father's people

MARION I see So you didn't meet until you were grown up, then ? That is very interesting And did you like each other at first sight ?

RENÉ Yes, I thought Frik the loveliest woman I had ever seen

FRIK René, please !

RENÉ I still like to draw her In fact, when Mr Smith came—Smith the poet, you know—he was tired of looking at Frik in every kind of position, with clothes and without

MARION Did Mrs Smith look at your drawings ?

RENÉ Mrs Smith ? No Why ?

MARION She seemed to be impressed by your devotion to your sister I thought perhaps she had reached her conclusion when she saw your drawings

RENÉ I don't draw Frik because I'm devoted to her, but because she is beautiful

HAZEL No one will ever draw Mrs Smith for any reason (*To RENÉ*) Do you remember her sitting on that chair looking sniffily at her bun and holding her cup as if she was searching for fly marks ?

[They go on talking and laughing together]

FRIK (*to MARION, antagonistically*) Why do you find it remarkable that René should be devoted to me ?

MARION I don't It was Mrs Smith who did

FRIK Mrs Smith is an evil woman

SIR CUTHBERT Oh, come ! Agatha may not be a——

FRIK (*to MARION*) And you are evil to listen to her talk, and then to sit there saying things that mean something quite different Do you think I do not know that you are mocking us ?

MARION But, my dear Mademoiselle Rydman——

FRIK My title is Froken Rydman I am not French

MARION My dear Froken Rydman, I had no intention of mocking you

SIR CUTHBERT You misunderstand Mrs Slade, Mademoiselle——

FRIK Froken

SIR CUTHBERT Froken She had no intention of offending you

FRIK No ? Perhaps not She did not think that I would notice that she amuses herself at my expense (*To MARION*) You must think me very stupid

RENÉ Frik, please !

FRIK You must all think us very stupid You did not want us here because you are friends to us You asked us here out of curiosity It is all very plain (*Pushing back her chair*) I do not stay any longer to provide amusement for you I am going home

RENÉ Frik, don't !

FRIK You can laugh at us all you please , it is a free country, England , but do not expect me to be present while you laugh (*Going to the door*) I do not stay to be insulted

HAZEL (*going to her*) Oh, please, Mademoiselle Rydman——

RENÉ (*intervening*) No, let me

[FRIK *has gone out*

I know how to——

HAZEL But can't I do anything? I'm so sorry——

RENÉ No, please! (*To the rest*) Please forgive My sister—her nerves are bad She—I regret very much the occurrence

[*Exit*

LAURA (*after a pause*) Very interesting! But just a little wee bit too *farouche* Can I have some more of the pear stuff, darling?

CURTAIN

SCENE III

A residential street in the West End of London, some half an hour later The scene consists of the front of a house, railings guarding an area, and three steps up to a doorway

The street is deserted, but the voices of RENÉ and FRIK can be heard approaching

FRIK (*as they enter*) First you storm at me and then you are nice to me, and I think I like it better when you storm It is easier to bear

RENÉ But I cannot go on being angry

FRIK That would be better than your patronising kindness

RENÉ (*indignant*) I am not patronising!

FRIK You make allowances for me as if I were a child

RENE You are a child—a very naughty, badly brought up, ill mannered, ill natured child How else can I think of you?

FRIK (*sinking on to the steps of the house, in tears*) Oh, yes It is true Oh, what has happened to me I behave like a peasant

RENÉ (*sitting beside her*) Come ! To-night it was just because you were tired and nervous and hadn't had enough to eat lately——

FRIK I was drunk, I think I'm still a little drunk

RENÉ It was foolish of you to drink your wine before eating——

FRIK And, what is worse, I was jealous of that girl

RENÉ What ? (*Flinging an arm round her in great delight*) Hurrah !

FRIK No, no, it is humiliating contemptible I am not in love with you Why should I mind that you admire her ? I have lost myself I care about things not worth caring for I should never have come to live with you, René I know now that I want peace of mind more than anything else in the world, and I shall never have it while we are together

RENÉ But, Frik, it is only because we are poor just now that things are bad We fly into tempers not because it matters, the thing we argue about, but because we are tired and the house is uncomfortable and all that But in a little——

FRIK No, no I cannot stay any longer I must go away I must possess myself again

RENÉ Oh, please, Frik, don't talk about it just now Let us sleep first, and talk about it to morrow Things will look different then

FRIK No, they won't I have behaved like a peasant nothing can alter that To morrow, when I am no longer a little drunk, I shall probably want to die when I remember it It is no use, René I must go away by myself

RENÉ Oh, Frik don't You can't leave me

FRIK (*passionately*) I want my own life again I have work to do I cannot do it when I am like this

RENÉ (*after a pause*) Very well, Frik darling, you shall go away

FRIK (*crying again, now that it has come*) You do see how it is, don't you, Rene?

RENÉ Of course I see I understand, Frik Don't cry

FRIK How will you manage without me?

RENÉ Now don't begin a new worry already! I can manage very well alone

FRIK Yes (*Slowly*) I think perhaps you can You are equal to everything that happens It is I who am inadequate

RENÉ (*angrily, because it is so nearly true*) That is not true! I will not let you say such things

FRIK I have spoiled your friendships for you These people—after to night they will dismiss you from their thoughts

RENÉ Very well, let them I have already dismissed them from mine

FRIK But they may not even pay for the bust now

RENÉ Oh, Miss Graham will go on coming

FRIK You are very sure!

RENÉ Yes

FRIK René, are you in love with her?

RENÉ No, I shall never be in love with any one but Ingrid Rydman, and she doesn't love me

FRIK Oh, yes, I love you But there is no happiness for us together I must go away

RENÉ You may go away, but you cannot separate us that way We are so much a part of each other now We cannot be alone any more

[*The door behind them opens and a BUTLER appears*

BUTLER Might I point out that these steps are private property, and are not provided as seats for the public ?

[FRIK rises hastily, RENÉ at his leisure

RENÉ What harm do we do to your steps ?
(*Observing that the man is a servant and not the owner*) The steps are not yours, anyhow You are only a servant, a silly man in silly clothes You come when they ring a bell and you go when they say 'Go, James,' and in between times you steal the wine and get drunk

BUTLER You'd better go, before I call the police and give you in charge for using insulting language

FRIK Come away, René

RENÉ (*not listening*) One cannot insult you Your father wore a tail just like yours, and your mother, she was thrown out of a harem window into the river because no one would claim her, but even the river refused her, so she was washed up on——

[*The door bangs behind the* BUTLER

If he bangs the door like that they will sack him Oh, don't cry, Frik, don't cry (*Putting his arm round her as they walk off*) To morrow you shall go to the country Somewhere high up, so that you can see the sun rise and set And it will be cool and green and quiet, and you will forget all about René Latour That is a beautiful picture, isn't it ?

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE I

The studio on a late autumn evening

RENÉ *has achieved his ambition and is at work on an animal sculpture in stone The room is completely uncared for and covered with stone dust, clay and scraps of all sorts RENÉ looks ill and physically tired a man filled with an idea which is riding him to death*

There is a knock at the door which RENÉ is too absorbed to hear It is repeated, and after a pause, as the knock is ignored and the sound of his work can be plainly heard outside, the door opens and a girl stands on the threshold She is small, painfully thin, pretty in a pert way, and her profession is obviously the streets Her name is DOLL SIMMONS

DOLL Good evening

RENÉ (*pausing to glance at her and going on*) If you are looking for Mr Cooper, he lives in number four

DOLL What makes you think I want Mr Cooper ?

RENÉ He is usually looking for someone about this time

DOLL What a mess !

RENÉ Very well You don't have to clean it up

DOLL I don't suppose you do either

RENÉ What do you think I do with it ?

DOLL Push it out of the door, I expect

RENÉ There is a horrible draught

[She refuses the hint, comes in and closes the door]

DOLL All alone these days, aren't you ?
What's happened to your friend ?

RENÉ Friend ?

DOLL The woman you used to live with

RENÉ Oh, my sister

DOLL You don't look very alike to me

RENÉ Is it necessary to look alike ?

DOLL Advisable Wouldn't you like me to clean up for you ?

RENÉ No, thank you

DOLL Honest, I never saw such a mess What would your sister say if she was to walk in ?

RENÉ She isn't likely to walk in

DOLL (*answering the regret in his voice*) Not dead, is she ?

RENÉ No, in the country

DOLL Same thing, practically Aren't you even going to offer me a drink ?

RENÉ I think you would be luckier with Mr Cooper

DOLL Stop pushing that fat slug down my throat, will you ? He's no friend of mine Can't I make a friendly call once in a while without being insulted ?

RENÉ I beg your pardon

DOLL Granted (*Too carefully off hand*) Got anything to eat ?

RENÉ (*really looking at her for the first time*) There's some cocoa still hot on the stove, I think (*He indicates the kitchen*)

DOLL Shall I bring you some ?

RENÉ No, thanks

[*She goes into the kitchen*

(*Calling*) There is bread in the cupboard

DOLL Right o' ! (*After a moment*) Where is the sugar ?

RENÉ There isn't any

DOLL I can't drink cocoa without sugar !

RENÉ Very well, leave it

DOLL (*appearing at the door with a mug in her hand*)
I say, are you as poor as that ?

RENÉ As what ?

DOLL Not being able to afford sugar

RENÉ Oh, no, I just forgot to buy any

DOLL But there's nothing in the cupboard
but this (*She exhibits the tired piece of bread which
she is holding*)

RENÉ Isn't there ?

DOLL When did you have your last meal ?

RENÉ Oh, I go out for my meals If you drank
your cocoa you wouldn't talk so much

DOLL (*coming in slowly and beginning to eat*) If I
didn't want this so badly I wouldn't believe
you

RENÉ (*more amiably*) Things bad with you ?

DOLL You wouldn't believe This district's no
good to me since it went artistic

[*As RENÉ looks enquiring*

Amateurs do all the trade (*Indicating his work*)
What's that ?

RENÉ A fawn—a young deer

DOLL (*having considered it*) Well, you should
know Don't look like anything to me Just gives
me a feeling

RENÉ Gives you—— Does it do that ? What
kind of feeling ?

DOLL Don't know You know the feeling you
get when you've had a fizzy drink and the fizz
comes back down your nose Sort of pleased and
tickled (*Going on to a clay bust of HAZEL GRAHAM*)

And that's Miss Berkeley Square And very nice too !

RENÉ (*turns to her*) Miss who ?

DOLL That's what I call her—the girl with the expensive clothes Don't know her name

RENÉ You seem to know a lot about my affairs

DOLL Oh, yes I've been keeping an eye on you God ! doesn't cocoa taste awful without sugar ? For a foreigner, you know, you re queer Most foreigners have half a dozen lady friends, but you're not that way at all, are you ? I used to think maybe you were in love with her (*indicating HAZEL's bust*)

RENÉ And you think I am not ?

DOLL Not you !

RENÉ How do you know ?

DOLL I was hanging over the railing when that block of stone was being delivered to you the other day

RENÉ Oh, was that you ?

DOLL That was me If any man looked at me the way you looked at that block of stone I d slap his face—and I'm not particular (*Her glance going again to HAZEL's head*) She's got a hope ! (*Seeing RENÉ's question*) Oh, yes, she s interested in you all right

RENÉ You tell fortunes ?

DOLL No, I've watched her coming to the door She begins to primp half way down the street

RENÉ To what ?

[DOLL *puts down her empty mug and gives a very fine imitation of HAZEL's demure dress and hair adjustments like all good caricatures, it is comment as well as mockery*

RENÉ *laughs appreciatively*

DOLL Yes, on the stage I should have been
Lots of people have told me that It's a gift
Here's your sister coming in from shopping on a
wet day and she's late and she's forgotten her
umbrella——

RENÉ You leave my sister alone

DOLL But I——

RENÉ You leave her alone

DOLL All right, touchy ! Very quick on the
trigger, aren't you ?

RENÉ (*a little disconcerted at betraying so much
emotion amiably*) Perhaps My mother used to
say that I was *soupe au lait*

DOLL What is that ?

RENÉ Milk that boils up all in a second

DOLL You French ?

RENÉ Yes

DOLL Why did you leave France ? (*She begins
her poking about again*)

RENÉ Because I hate it

DOLL Uh uh I have a sister married to a *chef*
at Boulogne She says they're an awful lot

RENÉ Oh, does she ? At least they can cook

DOLL Yes, but the dirt she says you wouldn't
believe They're as afraid of soap and water as
a cat

RENÉ They have the wit to recognise the
inessentials of life, perhaps Anyhow, Boulogne
is not France My mother's kitchen at home
shines like a mirror Rows of copper pans She
would never leave a kettle black the way the
English do She works harder than any English
servant would, but she has a pride that no
Englishwoman knows She is the real France,
my mother

DOLL I thought you hated France

RENÉ So I do

DOLL Don't you believe it ! (*Nodding at the bust of HAZEL*) Why haven't you done one of your sister's ?

RENÉ I have, often But I wasn't pleased with them Some day I shall do one in stone—a good one

DOLL (*coming on a half written letter on the table*) This your writing ? What a funny thin scrawl you foreigners write

RENÉ We don't read other people's letters, anyhow

DOLL (*reading*) “ Darling Frikk——”

RENÉ Leave that letter alone

DOLL ‘ I didn't write to you last night because I fell asleep ’

RENÉ Stop it

DOLL That's a nice kind of love letter to write anyone !

RENÉ Stop it !

[*He tries to snatch the letter from her, but she holds it beyond his reach, laughing, still trying to read it*]

DOLL Oh, go on ! Just let me see——

RENÉ Give me that letter, I tell you

[*The quick rage of the half starved overwhelms him He seizes her by the throat*]

Damn you, give me that !

[*Enter HAZEL GRAHAM, unseen by either*]

DOLL (*dropping the letter, in great astonishment and indignation*) Here, what's the matter with you ? (*She sees HAZEL*)

HAZEL I'm afraid I'm interrupting

[*Both turn*]

DOLL (*tartly*) Oh, no, that's all right Just our fun

HAZEL (*to RENÉ*) I said I'd look in about the casting of the head

RENÉ Oh, yes I forgot I'm afraid the chairs are all very dusty (*Seeing HAZEL's look at DOLL*) This is—I don't know your name

DOLL Doll Simmons

RENÉ Miss Graham (*To HAZEL, casually*) She dropped in just to cheer me up

HAZEL I see

DOLL (*resenting the tone*) No, you don't Not a bit

RENÉ (*having dusted a chair*) There ! Do sit down

HAZEL I won't sit down, thank you I only came on business I won't interrupt you

DOLL You're not interrupting us I'm going

HAZEL Oh, don't go because of me, please I should hate to break up the party

DOLL (*angry*) God ! how rude your kind can be when you're being polite Why should you jump to conclusions just because you don't like the look of me ?

RENÉ Shut up ! Don't talk to Miss Graham that way

DOLL And even if your conclusions was correct, what right have you to object ? I know your kind Coming down here slumming Well, you're well off the mark this time, lady You don't matter a row of pins to *him* ! He only cares for two things in this life that (*she indicates the stone he has been working on*) and the woman he lives with

HAZEL Woman he lives with ? Oh, his sister (*She is a little annoyed at having been drawn*)

DOLL Sister my eye !

[She sounds so sure that HAZEL looks to RENÉ for denial]

RENÉ She is right Frik isn't my sister We meant to tell you some time, because you have been so kind and charming to us——

HAZEL It isn't necessary to explain It is none of my business

RENÉ But I should like you to understand

HAZEL Please don't worry There is no need to account to me for your personal affairs

RENÉ But you don't realise just what——

[There is the sound of a weight being put down outside the door FRIK opens the door, picks up the case she has put down (her other hand and arm are loaded with strange bundles) and moves into the room]

(In incredulous joy) Frik !

HAZEL You'll send the cast to Queen Anne Street, won't you ? Good evening, Mademoiselle Rydman

[She passes FRIK and goes out]

RENÉ *(hugging FRIK)* Frik ! Oh, but this is wonderful ! A miracle

FRIK *(tired and angry)* Why didn't you come to meet me ?

RENÉ How could I come to meet you when I didn't know that you were coming ?

FRIK I sent you a telegram this morning To the office

RENÉ Oh, I haven't been to the office for a month and more

FRIK You lost your job ?

RENÉ No, I gave it up Oh, it was no use, Frik I couldn't work there all day at a desk and then come home and work all night at this I

had no time, no strength for both, and it had to be this

FRIK But what are you living on ?

RENÉ Oh, I had the ten shillings you sent me——

FRIK But that is weeks ago !

RENÉ And I have sold one or two things (*Dismissing it*) You're here, Frik ! I can't believe it

FRIK Miss Graham was very rude She might have waited a little

RENÉ She is a little upset You see, she happened to come in at what the English would call an awkward moment

FRIK (*her glance going to DOLL, beginning to visualise the probable awkward moment*) Oh !

DOLL (*reassuring her*) No Not as bad as that He was only killing me

FRIK Killing you !

DOLL For reading a letter he was writing to you

FRIK Oh !

RENÉ (*taking her bundles*) Sit down, Frik You must be tired I am desolated about the telegram

DOLL Well, I'll be trotting along Sorry I lost my rag with your lady friend

FRIK (*matter of factly*) Have you paid her ?

DOLL Oh, he don't owe me anything (*Seeing RENÉ's face growing white and vague, catching him by the arm*) Here, you sit down yourself (*She pushes him on to the chair which has been meant first for HAZEL and then for FRIK*)

RENÉ It is all right I am just a little dizzy

FRIK René, what is it ? Are you ill ?

DOLL (*scornful*) No ' I know what's the matter with him (*To FRIK*) You got any money ?

FRIK (*obediently*) Yes, a little

DOLL Give me sixpence and I'll get some fish and chips at the corner for him

FRIK (*understanding*) Oh (*Fumbling in her purse*) Yes There is one and sixpence That will get three lots

DOLL Three ?

FRIK Yes I haven't had supper either

DOLL You're a lady I don't wonder he likes you (*Going*) Won't be long If there's any change, I'll get a bottle of beer

[*Exit*

FRIK (*half kneeling by him*) René, you foolish boy, why have you let yourself get like this ?

RENÉ Like what ? I'm all right I forgot to have lunch, that is all

FRIK And to tell me all those lies about the office

RENÉ It is your fault that you have lies told you Those who don't fuss aren't told fibs You're not angry that I didn't meet you, are you ? I am sorry about that All those bundles Poor Frik ! And this mess—don't mind it, Frik I can clear it all up in an hour You shall sit in a chair and not do a thing Don't go away again just because the place is untidy (*he clutches at her like a scared child*), will you, Frik ? I didn't know, you understand It never occurred to me that you might—

FRIK There ! Of course I am not going away I am never going away again It was a mistake, René

RENÉ But, Frik—weren't you happy ? Your letters were so pleased I was glad that you should have peace at last

FRIK Peace? (*She considers it*) Yes, it was quiet, and very lovely

RENÉ And you had time to work

FRIK Yes, to work—and to think

RENÉ (*eager*) You did work? You said you were working

FRIK Yes, I worked

RENÉ (*relieved*) There, I knew you would when you made up your mind to (*Cheerfully*) Well, now that you are back I must get a job again I have done so much real work that I can afford to have a job Let's think of something that isn't at a desk Suppose I design wall-papers for the bourgeoisie Roses on trellises, and friezes of ships sailing on crinkly seas, *hein?*

FRIK (*hesitatingly*) René, you know the little cheques—?

RENÉ Yes? What about them? Nothing has happened to them, has it?

FRIK No At least—no Only—well, it is like this In the long days, when I have time, and peace to think, my thoughts settle down They grow still and clear And I see very plain how selfish I am

RENÉ You're the most unselfish woman I—

FRIK No, listen to me I know much now I know, first, that I shall never write the great book we talked of

[*As RENÉ shows signs of protesting*

Oh, yes, I have talent I shall write a book—like ten thousand other books When at last I make myself acknowledge that, I see how selfish I am All the time I live on my little cheque thinking only of myself and the book I should write I keep that small security to myself, jealous, like a miser And at last I see how

shameful I am So I—sell the little property in Sweden, and instead of a little useless cheque that is no good to anyone we have a sum of money Quite a lot, it seems, after the cheques For a year—perhaps a little longer—we live on that——

RENÉ I live on your money ' I shall do——

FRIK Oh, listen, René (*She puts her hand over his mouth*) You will work, and be happy We shall not have to think of the rent, nor whether we can have a fire——

RENÉ But I can't do that ' Don't you see——

FRIK You have no choice now I have done it

RENÉ But you can reinvest the money

FRIK That is what I do I invest it in you You can do those great things that I can never do If I invest the money again, it brings only daily bread , if I spend it this way, it makes beauty and happiness You can't refuse it, René It is the measure of my faith in you

RENÉ (*after a long pause*) Of your love

CURTAIN

SCENE II

The scene is the same, but the time is summer, 1914 There are evidences of prosperity, although the studio itself can never be anything but a poor one FRIK has hung a curtain over the kitchen door The bed has disappeared behind a screen The furnishings are comfortable, if not expensive, and there is a cupboard for dishes and a curtain-wardrobe on the wall Round the room are various small pieces of sculpture By the window RENÉ is working on a head of FRIK The head is finished and he is now putting finishing touches to the base

Centre, on the most comfortable chair, is HERGESHEIMER, art dealer, large and prosperous, and wearing habitually that deprecating air inevitable to a man whose profession is such that at any moment of the day he is liable to be faced with something that he may want to buy. He is holding a small piece of sculpture in a depreciatory paw

HERGESHEIMER (*making a concession*) Sixteen pounds

RENÉ (*without emotion, not pausing*) No

HERGESHEIMER (*very generous*) Well, say seven teen We won't haggle

RENÉ It is you who are haggling

HERGESHEIMER My dear boy, I'm a business man, not a philanthropist Where is my profit to come from? I shall never get more than twenty pounds for the thing (*His attention coming from the thing he wants to buy to RENÉ's work*) That on commission?

RENÉ No, this I do for love—both French and English meanings

HERGESHEIMER (*getting up and walking round it*) Iphm Iphm Clever in a way But a mistake, my dear boy, a mistake Not in the movement Not in the fashion If you're going to make a name or money, you've got to go with the stream And a little in front of it at that Yes, a little in front of it

RENÉ A bad metaphor

HERGESHEIMER What's that? (*Meaning "What did you say?"*)

RENÉ A geographical impossibility

HERGESHEIMER You chaps have a new jargon every week

[*There is a knock on the door*]

RENÉ Come in!

[Enter LAURA GADD *She stands holding the knob of the door, looking round the room*

LAURA (*with an exclamation of satisfaction at sight of RENÉ*) Third time lucky ! I wish you'd put up your name somewhere I've already interviewed a large man in a beard and a small man in braces

RENÉ Come in, Miss—Miss——

LAURA Gadd

RENÉ (*apologising for not remembering her name*)
It is so long since we met

LAURA Yes, it must be nearly a year since that dinner of Hazel's Hel lo, Hymie ! You here !
(*To RENÉ*) That is as good as a diploma for you I've just come from the Brook Street exhibition I saw your two things there

RENÉ Three things

LAURA Three ! I seem to have missed some thing And I was going to congratulate you on having success on your doorstep But (*indicating HERGESHEIMER*) I see it's in the midst

RENÉ It was kind of you to come

LAURA Oh, I didn't come out of goodness of heart My nose brought me

RENÉ Your nose ?

LAURA Yes, I can smell news a thousand miles away And you're it You bought anything, Hymie ?

RENÉ (*pointing to the carving HERGESHEIMER has been toying with*) Yes, he has bought that

[HERGESHEIMER *drops it like a hot cake He is about to protest, but changes his mind he respects LAURA's flair for news*

LAURA (*picking it up*) Oh, very nice ! How much ?
Or is it a secret ?

RENÉ No Twenty pounds

LAURA (*seeing HERGESHEIMER's disgusted look and misinterpreting it*) It's all right, Hymie, I won't tell (*Examining the head*) And that is your sister You are abnormally devoted, aren't you ?

RENÉ (*staring at her*) Are we ?

LAURA (*not liking the stare*) Oh, you know what I mean Most brothers and sisters hate the sight of each other I d watch *my* sister drown and play He-loves me, he loves me not " with the bubbles Well, I don't know much about sculpture, but that seems to be abnormally fine What do you think, Hymie ?

HERGESHEIMER Mannered

LAURA (*imitating HERGESHEIMER's attitude*) Don't bother finishing it, dear boy All right, Hymie, I didn't come to interrupt your deal It's just that I'm doing an article for the *Mail* on rising young artists and their personalities, and if you're not rising I'm a chinaman Now tell me something about yourself The more heart to heart the better

RENÉ What do you want to know ? What soap I use ? Or if I believe in God ?

LAURA Well—I think both the domestic and the religious notes have gone a bit flat with wear Tell me, who do you think the greatest influence in modern art ?

RENÉ René Latour

LAURA René ? Oh (*Amused*) All right, that's good enough You understand publicity, don't you ?

RENÉ No, I just say what I think

LAURA It's the same thing Do you see any thing of Hazel Graham these days ?

RENÉ No, not since last autumn

LAURA She got that head for a fiver, didn't she ? Ridiculous !

RENÉ Five pounds is never ridiculous

LAURA Of course, you must have been very poor That might do ! The regenerating effect of poverty on the human soul Lily in the mud and all that sort of thing What, now, in your opinion, is the greatest affliction of poverty ? Hunger ?

RENÉ The lack of privacy

LAURA You mean living and sleeping and everything in one or two tiny rooms ?

RENÉ Oh, no One chooses the person who shares the rooms That is not so bad

LAURA What do you mean by lack of privacy, then ?

RENÉ Not having servants to push importunate people off one's doorstep

LAURA Oh ! (*Eyeing him*) I think you're quite capable of doing your own pushing And some day, my young friend, your second footman will be scraping them off your front steps like ants Well, I'm dashing off to lunch Cora Bartlett's (*To HERGESHEIMER, who has been prowling round the studio*) Do you know her ? The meanest woman in London Cod and stewed prunes (*To RENÉ*) But I must buy something of yours So that in the future I can work the conversation round to it and say " Oh, yes, a little thing by René Latour I knew him when he was just beginning " (*She has been examining the smaller sculptures Picking up one*) That's very charming How much is that ?

RENÉ That is sold

LAURA Oh, dear, how sad I liked that And this ?

RENÉ That is sold too

LAURA You're doing very well

RENÉ Yes, people like to pick up small things for next to nothing

LAURA That leaves me shattered, doesn't it ? Well, as I don't rent Buckingham Palace, your larger efforts must remain here as far as I'm concerned Or perhaps Hymie will relieve you of them

[As she is beginning to go

By the way, Hymie, are you British ?

HERGESHEIMER I am

LAURA That's nice I should have been sorry if we were in different boats Rather like putting to sea in a bowl, all this business, isn't it ?

[Turning to RENÉ, whose mind and attention have gone back to his work

Are you thinking of going back to France, Monsieur Latour ?

RENÉ *(not understanding)* To France ? No, why should I ? I loathe France

LAURA Oh Oh, well Artists have no country, they say *Au revoir (Shakes hands)* Give my love to your sister 'Bye, Hymie !

[Exit

HERGESHEIMER Why didn't you sell her the thing she wanted ?

RENÉ I don't like her

HERGESHEIMER Good heavens, my dear boy, you can't do business that way There is no emotion in business

RENÉ I don't like her and I don't sell her my work

HERGESHEIMER Oh, she's not a bad sort really

Wants slapping All these successful women do
Once they get the vote there'll be no holding
them

*[Enter FRIK, from the street She is carrying books
and shopping basket, and she looks happy and at
peace]*

FRIK I met a woman on the stairs, and I'm
quite sure it is that woman who was at——
(*She sees HERGESHEIMER*)

RENÉ Frik! This is Mr Hergesheimer He
has come to look at my work

HERGESHEIMER Your sister? How do you do?
(*And then, in a slightly different tone, as something
in FRIK impresses him*) How do you do?

FRIK You like René's work?

HERGESHEIMER Yes, I've just bought that
(*He looks from her to the head*)

FRIK Yes, that is me It is wonderful, isn't it?

HERGESHEIMER A little mannered (*Reluctantly*)
But it does convey you It has something (*To
RENÉ*) Have you any drawings that I could use?

RENÉ I have drawings, but they are not inter-
esting I have pushed most of them into the
kitchen

HERGESHEIMER The kitchen?

RENÉ Yes, Frik uses them for standing the
pans on It saves her scrubbing

HERGESHEIMER Are you serious?

FRIK Yes, he won't let me keep them If I
don't use them, he tears them up

RENÉ Why should I keep them? They are
just practice—experiment

HERGESHEIMER Good God! The kitchen?
Where?

FRIK The kitchen is here

[She leads him through the curtained doorway One can hear their voices]

Presently she comes back and goes to the table where she left the books and basket RENÉ is once more mooning round the head, he can obviously think of little else

He is scrabbling among them like a chicken

RENÉ Did you get the crayons ?

FRIK *(taking a small parcel from the basket)* Yes Sixpence

RENÉ *(noticing the books)* More reading, when you should be working

FRIK Oh, but I have done a lot of writing these last few days I can be frivolous for a little *(Taking butter out of its paper, putting it on a plate and putting it away in the cupboard)* I was reading a paper coming in the bus

RENÉ Plutocrat Why didn't you bring it home ?

FRIK Oh, it wasn't my paper The man next me had it It seems that there is going to be a war in Europe

RENÉ There is always a war in Europe

FRIK The headlines were very colossal Perhaps it is important

RENÉ It will be important to the papers This is the time of the year when they see serpents at the seaside

FRIK You don't think it may be serious ?

[She is merely being conversational, not in the least anxious or disturbed]

RENÉ Of course it is serious Someone has no doubt insulted someone That is always very serious They demand apologies And someone sends a warship—if they have one It is probably

Turkey, so they won't have one In that case they send a note And all the papers have a high old time And all the diplomats who want decorations try to keep the peace, and all the soldiers who want decorations try to——

[Enter HERGESHEIMER from the kitchen, bearing a paper in front of him indignantly]

HERGESHEIMER (*holding the paper in front of RENÉ's nose*) And I suppose you call this practice 'Experiment' !

RENÉ Certainly

HERGESHEIMER I'll give you ten shillings for it ! What do you think of that ?

RENÉ You can have it for fifteen

HERGESHEIMER But it was under the *kettle* ! (*He exhibits the other side, black ringed*)

RENÉ Very likely But if you offer ten shillings you will sell it for twenty I let you have it for fifteen

HERGESHEIMER If I could but express my emotions !

RENÉ There is no emotion in business

HERGESHEIMER All right, I'll buy it, but on condition that you let me have my pick of the others for two shillings each

RENÉ Very well Frik can buy some oilcloth

FRIK But, René, you don't know they may be worth more

HERGESHEIMER (*admiring his new possession*) My boy, this is the loveliest bit of drawing I've seen for years

RENÉ It is wooden, irresolute, and amateurish, but I am glad you're pleased

HERGESHEIMER (*going back to choose the rest*) All right, Michael Angelo

FRIK René, you shouldn't

RENÉ Don't be greedy, Frik.

[He slips an arm round her, kisses her lightly on the hair above her ear, and they stand together considering the portrait of her]

You like it ?

[FRIK nods, smiling]

FRIK I am so happy, René I think there is not room in me for all the happiness

RENÉ No It runs out of your eyes

FRIK *(going to the window and sitting on the sill)*
And when you have made a little more money we will go away from here, have a nice home with a separate studio where you can make all the mess you like and I can't be cross *(The mention of her crossness reminds her)* That woman on the stairs—— ?

RENÉ Yes, it was Miss Gadd

FRIK She was here ? What did she want ?

RENÉ She is writing in the paper about me

FRIK *(delighted)* Oh, René ?

RENÉ She also wanted to buy the bird carving

FRIK And didn't she ?

RENÉ No, I told her it was sold

FRIK But, René, how foolish !

RENÉ Would you have liked her to have it ?

FRIK I wouldn't have *liked* it, perhaps, but we cannot choose our clients

RENÉ I can

FRIK People will call that swelled head, but it was the same when you were without a sou, and nobody

RENÉ I have been without a sou, but I was never nobody

FRIK (*in answer to a hail from outside, looking down*)
Yes ? For us ? Yes, I can catch

[*The POSTMAN throws up a newspaper, which she catches*

POSTMAN (*heartily*) Thank you, ma'am ! That
saves my legs a bit ! Fine morning

FRIK Oh, a lovely, lovely morning Thank
you (*To RENÉ*) Someone has sent us a paper
It is for you

RENÉ From Dijon ?

FRIK No English To day's *Daily World*

RENÉ It will be about the exhibition See !

FRIK (*searching*) Yes ! They have put crosses

[*They spread it on the table, and read*

Enter HERGESHEIMER

HERGESHEIMER Well, there you are ! (*Exhibits them*) Seven drawings at two shillings One at fifteen I'll send down for the sculpture this afternoon, and the cheque will come at the same time And if you like to send up the bigger things, I'll give them room and see what I can do with them They'll do better at my place than here

[*To RENÉ, who is absorbed in the paper*

That all right ?

RENÉ (*absorbed still*) Oh, yes, thank you, that
will be very nice Thank you for everything
You are very kind

HERGESHEIMER (*going*) I haven't swindled you,
if that's what you mean I'd like to meet the
man who could Good-bye, Miss Latour Look
in when you're passing, Latour

[*Exit*

RENÉ, *having finished reading the part which applies to him, leaves the paper to FRIK, and returns to his beloved head*

RENÉ They admired the least good one, of course

FRIK But they are charming about them, René ! "The most arresting thing in the exhibition" 'It is to be hoped he will not allow his undoubted talent to be frittered away in experiments' That is a silly thing to say Oh, but they are very nice to you Nicer than to anyone else

[The middle sheets of the paper slide to the floor and she picks them up and re inserts them As she does so she sees the front page of the paper and pauses to read]

René ! What do you think ? France has gone to war with Germany !

RENÉ What !

FRIK *(taking the paper over to show him)* Look ! That will make all your hated little French bourgeois sit up, won't it ?

[Clock begins to strike twelve]

Goodness, I must put on the meat

[She snatches the basket from the table and goes into the kitchen]

We must have something special for supper, to celebrate to day Mustn't we ?

[RENÉ reads the short, large typed notice, and stays a moment quite still Then his eyes go to the head, which typifies for him everything that he must give up He folds the paper neatly]

(Putting her head in) Shall I put onions with the meat ?

RENÉ *(at random)* No

FRIK *(surprised)* No !

RENÉ *(impatiently)* Oh, yes, if you like

FRIK *(amiably)* All right—don't be cross, Michael Angelo

[Exit]

RENÉ (*having folded the paper and glanced again at the head—calling*) Where is there brown paper ?

FRIK (*from the kitchen*) In my suitcase under the bed

[RENÉ takes out the paper, spreads it on the table and begins to put his possessions in it Not clothes, but the more important things of his life his tools, the crayons she has just bought, and things of that sort Only afterwards he thinks of clothes

(*Coming in*) Take these things off the table so that I can set it, René (*Seeing the things*) René ! What are you doing ?

RENÉ I am packing

FRIK Where are you going ?

RENÉ I am going home

FRIK Home ? Where is home ?

RENÉ France, of course (*He says the name of his country in French*)

FRIK You mean you are going to France now ?

RENÉ Yes

FRIK But you don't even know if there is a train

RENÉ There will be a train There are always trains

FRIK But you can't go back to France, René ! You said so yourself They will arrest you They will put you in prison

RENÉ No, they won't Not now They will just grin and smack me on the back and say, "Hello, *mon vieux*, where have you been all this time ? You draw, one hears ? Very well, draw this gun And you carve, it seems ? Very well, here is a bayonet "

FRIK Oh, René, you can't You can't ! This is folly What good would you be as a soldier ?

RENÉ (*in perfectly honest indignation*) What good ' In a month I shall be a corporal

FRIK But there is no need to go ' You don't owe France anything They laughed at you , they insulted you , they would have none of you Why should you go back to them ?

RENÉ You don't understand

FRIK And *now* ' To go now, when people begin to talk about your work When everything was so happy How can you think of it ?

RENÉ I have no choice

FRIK But of course you have a choice You shook the dust of France off your feet years ago France is nothing to you Why should you go ?

RENÉ You don't understand

FRIK " You don't understand " ' You keep telling me " you don't understand " ' Well, explain to me

RENÉ This is not one of those things that one explains

FRIK René, please My mind goes round and round Can't you make me understand why you do it ? Why you give up everything when life is at last so good ? After all those dreadful times, to be happy, and to give it up—for what ?

RENÉ If Sweden was at war and you were a man, wouldn't you go home ?

FRIK No, I shouldn't I am no country's property I am cosmopolitan

RENÉ Then that is the difference between us I am French

FRIK But you have lived in Germany and liked the Germans

RENÉ Y-es So-so

FRIK And, anyhow, there is no need to go like

this, this minute , without food, without preparation, as if France were at the end of the street

RENÉ What is there to wait for ? Time is precious I have to go first to have my passport made right

FRIK That will take days

RENÉ Oh, no, it won't Not when I take it myself and tell them a thing or two

FRIK You would tell St Peter how to keep a gate !

RENÉ Yes, and, what is more, he would acknowledge that my way was an improvement

FRIK Oh, why did I say that ?

RENÉ Give me my other shirt

FRIK No, I won't help you I won't have any share in such folly

[As RENÉ, without remark, begins to go for it

All right, René, I'll get it

RENÉ You have improved me, haven't you ? Two years ago I should never have considered a clean shirt

FRIK But, René, there is no hurry You could wait for a day or two at least

RENÉ No hurry ! That is all a Swede knows about war My father has told me—in 1870—I think I'd better have socks too My father has told me things It will be good to think that you are safe in England

FRIK But you can't leave me here

RENÉ Why not ? You are comfortable here, and safe I shall send you my pay And now that I am going you will have more money of your own, darling Frik !

FRIK But I can't stay here if you go

RENÉ Oh, Frik, what nonsense ! You have your work You are going to do that so that I can boast about you in the battalion Here is your chance, with no René to look after, no Rene to bother and plague you Besides, you have these to sell (*indicating his work*) And I shall send you more from France Many, many more I shall make carvings out of the wreckage There will be lots of free material for an artist Rifle butts must be lovely wood to carve You can either sell them or keep them till I come back

FRIK But, René it is war What if ?

RENÉ Oh, I m coming back , don't worry I am going to be hanged, didn't you know ? That has always been prophesied for me

FRIK I can t stay in England without you, René I can't

RENÉ Then what can you do ? You can't come to France—no, you can t, not just now Do you want to go back to Sweden ?

FRIK I have no home in Sweden, you know that You brought me here to this country——

RENÉ Yes, and I got you a lot of nice friends Friends who are interested in you, and in your book

FRIK I don't think any of them like us

RENÉ But of course they do They are nice people They mean to be kind You mustn't be so distrustful of people, Frik I've told you about that before Oh, Frik, why do you make it difficult for me ? You can't believe that I *want* to go ?

FRIK No—no—— Oh, but what is there in life to cling to ? How can all this have happened in a few minutes ? The ground swept from under our feet Don't do it, René Don't go

RENÉ I must, Frik Can't you understand ?

FRIK Oh, what shall I do ? There isn't even a God to pray to

RENÉ No Only our own belief in ourselves Be sensible, Frik It is not so tragic For a little, I go and be a soldier , well ! For that little time you have peace to write your book , well again !

FRIK What peace will there be—— ?

RENÉ I have felt often that if it had not been for me your book might be finished by now It hurt me, that Don t feel that you have wasted those years with me, Frik, will you ? Whatever happens Because no one could have done for me what you did (*Indicating her portrait*) You have done that as much as I have And when they crowd round to admire, you can say “ I made René Latour ”

FRIK (*hitting out childishly in her misery*) Who says they will crowd round ?

RENÉ I do And they will want to know about me, and you will tell them Don t be hard on me, Frik Forget the tempers, and the shillings I spent when I shouldn't have Have you some string ?

[*The little mound of belongings is ready to be made into a parcel*

FRIK *takes string—two pieces of different lengths and thicknesses—from the table drawer and hands them to him He knots them together and slips the string under the bundle preparatory to folding over the paper FRIK, suddenly unable to bear it, flings her arms over the heap, her head buried in it, crying bitterly*

FRIK Oh, René, no, no !

RENÉ Poor Friar

[He comforts her

FADE OUT

*[The sound of his voice comforting her fades until
it becomes the approaching voice of the hearty LADY
in the final scene*

EPILOGUE

The scene is the same as in the Prologue The WOMAN is still sitting on the bench, shabby and unexpectant

Two HOUSEWIVES, well fed and self satisfied, cross from left to right

1ST HOUSEWIFE So I just said "Gracie," I said, ' when I say that you have to be in by ten o'clock I *mean* ten o'clock And the fact that *your* watch, or anyone else's watch, for that matter of it, says a quarter to

[They have gone]

They are followed a moment later by an ENGLISH MISTRESS and three sixth form GIRLS

MISTRESS Well, I think that we have seen all we came to see I only hope your essays will be as entertaining as my lecture

1ST GIRL Oh, it's been lovely, Miss Casson

THREE GIRLS (*in chorus*) Thank you so much, Miss Casson

2ND GIRL Miss Casson, do you think we'll have time to go to Harrods?

MISTRESS Well, we have to have tea, and we must catch the five o'clock

3RD GIRL (*lingering a little*) Who is that?
(*She indicates the head*)

MISTRESS I don't think I know (*Looking up the guide book*) Let me see Number 3779

2ND GIRL Oh, Doris, why do you ask stupid questions just now? I do want to get the lace at Harrods

MISTRESS Don't be impatient, Angela Satisfying Doris's intellectual curiosity is more important than your lace Here we are Three seven seven nine " ' The Laughing Woman ' By René Latour Born Dijon, 3rd December,

1894 Killed in France, June 1915, as a sergeant of French Infantry ”

[There is a pause, while they inspect the head

3RD GIRL Lovely, isn't she ?

MISTRESS Yes, a beautiful piece of work Now then, Angela, we shall get your lace

3RD GIRL *(as they move away)* I wish they had said who she was

[Away to the left the voice of the ATTENDANT is heard saying

ATTENDANT All out, please Closing time All out, please

[Presently he appears

All out, please

[He comes down to the motionless figure on the bench and touches her gently on the shoulder

We're shutting up, lady *(Going out right)* All out, please *(And again, a little further away)* All out, please

[The WOMAN gathers herself together, stands up weakly, and, without raising her eyes from the floor, moves slowly out

The stage is left to the amused, smiling woman on the pedestal

CURTAIN

SIXTEEN

Aimée and Philip Stuart

S I X T E E N

A Play

In Three Acts

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To
ALBAN LIMPUS

PEOPLE IN THE PLAY
(in order of appearance)

MRS MCNEIL

IRENE LAWRENCE

BABA LAWRENCE

MRS QUEEN

JENNIFER LAWRENCE

SIR JOHN CORBETT, K C

DR SLOANE

SCENES

ACT I

SCENE I Sitting room in Mrs Lawrence's flat
in London, S W 1 Wednesday afternoon

SCENE II The same The same night

ACT II

SCENE I The same Next afternoon

ACT III

SCENE I Irene and Baba's bedroom The same
night

SCENE II The sitting room again Next
morning

TIME Early February

SIXTEEN was first produced at the Embassy Theatre Subsequently at the Criterion Theatre with the following cast

<i>Mrs McNeil</i>	HELEN HAYE
<i>Irene Lawrence</i>	ANTOINETTE CELLIER
<i>Baba Lawrence</i>	ALEXIS FRANCE
<i>Mrs Queen</i>	MURIEL AKED
<i>Jennifer Lawrence</i>	FABIA DRAKE
<i>Sir John Corbett, K C</i>	GODFREY TEARLE
<i>Dr Sloane</i>	H G STOKER

The play produced by JOHN FERNALD

ACT I

SCENE I

The sitting room of an old fashioned flat situated between Knightsbridge and Sloane Square This room is pleasing to the eye as well as comfortable to live in The whole effect is harmonious and mellow A few good pieces of walnut—relics of better days—give the keynote There is a window and a fireplace The necessary furniture is a couch, several tables and comfortable chairs, and a corner cupboard There should be shelves holding books—a mixture of old fashioned volumes, modern novels, and girls story-books There are several lamps with becoming shades These are modern, but not bizarre On the wall is a portrait, in oils, of a young officer in war time flying kit MRS McNEIL, who spends most of her waking life in this room, has her own chair, table, and footstool On her table is a lamp that she can reach to switch on and off, a small clock that she can lift when she wants to see the time, a workbox, a bag of mending, an embroidery bag, and several framed photographs—of her husband in a Major's uniform, her son in Captain's uniform—both of the Black Watch—her daughter, JENNIFER, in presentation gown, and her grandchildren There is a fire in the grate MRS McNEIL's lamp is lighted, but the curtains are not yet drawn

When the curtain rises MRS McNEIL is putting a last stitch to an abbreviated garment made of a small amount of peach coloured satin and rather more ecru lace Having done this she folds it carefully, and packs it into a small fancy box lined with tissue paper This she proceeds to tie with ribbon

MRS McNEIL is a grey-haired woman of sixty three She has a charming, humorous, sympathetic face that would seem younger than her years if it were not that the nagging pain from rheumatism in her knees causes her to look easily tired By birth she belongs to the class of England's "gentry" Until

middle age she had known all the advantages of inherited property Since then she has been obliged to accustom herself to insecurity This, after a period of bitterness, has made her more than usually thoughtful for others Her husband and son were killed in the War

There is the sound of the front door being shut with a bang, followed by a noisy young voice, answered by another on a lower note They separate The lower one approaches, the other recedes MRS McNEIL listens with a smile She has just time to finish tying the ribbon into a bow and to put the box down when the door opens and IRENE comes in She is an attractive looking girl of sixteen, wearing clothes suitable for school and to her age These are not a uniform She carries a few books in a strap

IRENE Hello, Granny (*Eagerly scanning the mantelpiece*) Mother's letter come?

MRS McNEIL (*who had expected this*) Not yet There are several more deliveries this evening

IRENE (*trying to speak casually*) One's just gone by (*Her anxiety getting the better of her*) I do hope she's not ill again

MRS McNEIL If she were the Van Vorlens would have sent us a telegram

IRENE Five days since we heard And this is my birthday

MRS McNEIL It's the French post Why, I've known letters take nearly a week to get from one end of the street to another (*With a smile*) Come! She wouldn't like this, would she?

IRENE Sorry I can't help worrying She looked so awful when she went away

MRS McNEIL People always look like that after influenza Think how cheerful her last letter was! She was even looking forward to work again You know how the thought of work bothered her when she was ill

IRENE (*earnestly*) Granny—that's what I want to talk to you about—before Baba comes——

MRS McNEIL Yes ?

IRENE When I leave St Saviour's at the end of this term, instead of going for my year to the convent in Paris, I want to go as an apprentice to Bouchonner's or some other good dress making firm Then I might be able to take mother's place when she needs a rest Mightn't I ?

MRS McNEIL (*lifting her mending-bag and bringing out girls woollen stockings*) Rather young to start work, aren't you ?

IRENE (*reminding her*) Sixteen to day

MRS McNEIL I find that very hard to believe (*She finds a darning needle and wool*)

IRENE (*taking needle and threading it*) Why ? Do I look such a kid ?

MRS McNEIL I suppose not But it's such a short time since you were one

IRENE (*eagerly pursuing her point*) If Council School girls can start work at fourteen, why can't I at sixteen ?

MRS McNEIL No reason at all except that your mother has other ideas for you

IRENE (*dismissing them*) What ideas ? (*Handing back threaded needle*) To do the sort of thing she did when she was a girl ? Be presented at Court——

MRS McNEIL There were no Courts held during the War She made her curtsy as a matron, not as a debutante What's the matter ?

IRENE (*with a grimace*) Matron's " such a horrible word So solid and secure and comfortable—— !

MRS McNEIL It's very nice to be solid and secure and comfortable Especially secure

IRENE (*glancing at her mother's photograph and smiling at it almost maternally*) How adorable she looks. Certainly not like a matron (*Turning to her father's portrait*) Fancy having to lose someone like Father! I never see men like him nowadays.

MRS MCNEIL It's partly the uniform. He was an exceptionally nice looking young man. They made a very fine couple.

IRENE I love to think they were so happy. At least she has got something to look back on. Granny, I simply must try to be of use to her. Do help me.

MRS MCNEIL She's set her heart on your having a good time for a year or two. She's been saving for it.

IRENE Her illness must have used up all that.

MRS MCNEIL Not quite. The firm has kept on with her salary. Dr. Sloane's been absurdly moderate—the holidays costing her nothing except the fare. It'll be a real disappointment to her if you don't let her give you your chance. Later—(*with a little smile*)—if you don't marry, you'll have to do something of course.

IRENE It's ridiculous for me to be gadding about doing expensive things while she has to grind for our living. I shouldn't enjoy myself. I never thought about it till she was ill—just took it as a matter of course. Then when she was delirious, she let out a lot of things—things she'd never admit in the ordinary way—how tired she got and how afraid she was sometimes that she'd have to give in. I asked Dr. Sloane. He said people mostly rave about what's been on their minds just before. Now I know that I just can't go on being a burden.

MRS MCNEIL You were never a burden.

IRENE I ought to pull my weight anyhow. You

do agree, don't you ? Say you do I'll need you on my side

MRS McNEIL (*after a short pause—with a little sigh*) Yes I agree It is too much for her—the responsibility of us all I've realised that for a long while

IRENE I thought perhaps later we might have a little shop of our own (*Her eyes shining*) Think how lovely it would be—she and I—and you here to come home to Baba'll get married of course

MRS McNEIL Don t you want to marry ?

IRENE Some day perhaps

MRS McNEIL What about babies, you're so fond of them

IRENE I can be godmother to Baba's Anyhow I'll be their aunt

MRS McNEIL Not quite the same as having your own

IRENE Mother comes first

MRS McNEIL Just now, but—— What's that noise ?

[*The noise is the young voice already heard giving vent to a march tune This is accompanied by the beat of a wooden spoon on a tin tray The door is pushed open BABA stands marking time Over her short school "jibbah" is tied a plain white apron—too long On her head is perched a chef's cap made of paper She is waiting for someone to catch up*

BABA (*to the tray accompaniment*) Rum ta-tum-ta-tum tum tum ! Rum ta tum-ta tum tum tum Come on, Queen-one !

MRS QUEEN (*off*) Gimme time, Miss Baba Gimme time

[*MRS McNEIL and IRENE wait with the right air of expectation MRS QUEEN, also wearing a chef's cap and a large white apron, and carrying a*

*wooden platter holding a frilled birthday-cake, joins
BABA at the rear*

BABA Ready ?

MRS QUEEN (*putting her cap straight hastily*)
Yes, Miss

BABA Quick—*march* ! Rum-ta-tum-ta-tum tum
tum ! Rum-ta tum-ta-tum tum tum——

[*This is continued as they march solemnly round
the room, coming to a halt presently in front of
IRENE and MRS McNEIL*

—Halt ! Present—*arms* !

[BABA is a young materialist of nearly fourteen. She has enough charm to persuade us that we, too, would spoil her. The least hint of anything doing rouses her to excitement. MRS QUEEN, a woman of about fifty-five, belongs to the aristocracy of the servant class, and is proud of it. Members of her family, for several generations, have been employed in the "best houses." She herself, in ordinary times, would have been in charge of a staff. There is a Rabelaisian quality about her. She looks as if she could enjoy, and cap, a dirty story, if told in the right company. She is superstitious and sentimental, with a keen nose for tragedy. Her respect for this family which, even according to her pitiless code, is the real thing, allows her to work for it cheerfully as general servant. She identifies herself with each one, but finds BABA the most companionable—partly because of a natural affinity and partly because she has "had her from birth." She has a pleasant voice and a natural manner of speaking. She is a widow, her husband, who, as she tells us, was a butler, having died from the effects of gas-poisoning soon after the War.]

MRS McNEIL (*as BABA and MRS QUEEN come to a halt*) What have we here ? The Guards' Band ?

BABA (*briskly*) Birthday-cake — one — iced — officers, for the use of—— !

IRENE Birthday-cake ? Mine ?

MRS QUEEN Yes, Miss

BABA Who told you to speak, Sir ?

MRS QUEEN Sorry, Miss

BABA Miss ?

MRS QUEEN Sir, I mean, Miss

BABA Stand at—*ease* !

MRS QUEEN Does that mean I can put the cake down, Miss ?

BABA (*already relaxed—putting aside the tray and spoon*) Isn't it a lovely one, Granny ? Look closer All those little sugar rosettes—sixteen—for holding the candles

MRS McNEIL I ve seen it before

BABA (*to IRENE*) Queen-one made it herself

IRENE (*impressed*) Did you, Mrs Queen ? You'd think it'd been bought in one of the very best shops (*Examining it more closely*) It really is most professional

MRS QUEEN Seeing your Ma wasn't 'ere to buy you one (*With justifiable pride*) As good inside as out, Miss—though I says it as shouldn't Not too rich, but tasty I didn't put in no peel, Miss

IRENE Thanks awfully

BABA (*gloating*) Almond paste—two inches thick And presents

IRENE Presents ?

BABA Like in a Christmas pudding Sixpences, a thimble and a wedding ring Bag me the wedding ring ! And a sixpence

MRS QUEEN Don't you be so greedy, now ! One person can't 'ave but one thing (*To Mrs McNEIL*) The icing s took lovely, Ma'am 'Ave

a feel with the tip of your finger 'Ere, under the frilling It won't show

MRS MCNEIL (*touching the cake gently with a finger*) Just right, isn't it? Soft, yet firm

MRS QUEEN (*the artist*) It's the wite of egg beat to a foam does the trick You mix it in with your sugar and lemon juice There's quite good cooks don't know that little dodge I 'ad it from the French chef I worked under as kitchenmaid

BABA (*impatently*) Where are the candles?

MRS QUEEN (*feeling in her voluminous pockets*) I 'ad to 'ave three boxes, Ma'am They was seven to each—two making fourteen Us requiring sixteen it leaves me with five over Seems a bit extravagant, them being so thin I shan't 'ave no other use for them (*She hands the boxes to BABA as she speaks*)

BABA (*taking boxes*) You can keep them for my birthday cake

IRENE You'll need fourteen next time If we get one more box to add to the five, that'll only make twelve If we get two we'll still have five over

MRS QUEEN We'll just 'ave to keep them five till your next birthday

MRS MCNEIL Then how shall we stand?

BABA (*who is opening the boxes*) Next time Irene'll need seventeen Seventeen into—(*giggling*)—what's it into?

IRENE Seventeen means two boxes and three Two over Then you'll need fifteen One over Then I'll need eighteen Two boxes and—four Good! Lord! That means beginning all over again

BABA (*as they enjoy the joke*) What fun! We'll

have to go on for-ever-and ever world without
-end ahmen ! (*They giggle schoolgirlishly* BABA
lifts out a candle) Let me stick them on

MRS QUEEN Gently there, gently We don't
want them rosettes broke

MRS McNEIL It s Irene s cake, Baba Perhaps
she d like to do the candles herself ?

BABA (*delicately sticking the candles into the sugar
rosettes*) She doesn't mind Do you, Irene ?
I wish we were having the party to day instead
of on Saturday

MRS QUEEN (*going over to the window*) It ll take
you all of Sunday to get over it (*Glancing out
before she draws curtains*) It is a raw day, Ma am !
You and me s ad the best of it (*Draws curtains*)
Madam s well out of it

MRS McNEIL I was saying so to Irene, just
before you came in

BABA (*still sticking in candles*) Did you get
mother's letter ?

IRENE (*eagerly*) Has it come ?

BABA Wasn t it here ?

IRENE (*her hope dashed*) No

BABA (*with unconscious cruelty*) What a sell ! (*To
the room in general, her eyes on the cake*) She hurried
like stink all the way home

MRS McNEIL Like what ?

BABA (*grinning*) Stink (*To IRENE—her own
lack of sensitiveness allowing it*) She must have
forgotten your birthday

MRS McNEIL (*sharply*) Nonsense, Baba ! You
know your mother would never forget either of
your birthdays

BABA Then why hasn't her letter come ?

IRENE Granny says it's the French post

MRS QUEEN (*who is now at the grate replenishing*

the fire) I never did think much of the French, not since I'd to do with that chef. Not that you could make out what 'e said. It was the look 'e give when 'e said it.

BABA We could have understood. We know French.

MRS. QUEEN Not 'is sort I 'ope, Miss.

MRS. McNEIL (*who knows that MRS. QUEEN knows but can't resist a tendency to brag—a constant reminder*) Not too much coal, Mrs. Queen. The room's quite warm enough.

MRS. QUEEN (*desisting—to BABA*) 'Urry up with them candles. I want to put that cake in a safe place before I give you your teas.

BABA Just one more. Don't they look dinky? I do wish we could set them alight now.

MRS. McNEIL Must you always want everything to happen at once?

BABA Things aren't half such fun if you have to wait for them.

MRS. QUEEN Jist the spit of 'er father, isn't she, Ma'am?

BABA (*proudly*) I like to be like father.

MRS. QUEEN (*lifting the platter with the cake*) And so you ought! You don't touch 'im for looks.

BABA (*complacently*) You can't tell yet. I'm at my plainest stage.

MRS. QUEEN Pick up that tray and spoon and put 'em back where you got 'em from.

BABA (*conveniently collapsing*) I'm tired.

MRS. QUEEN Come on now, Miss. What did you promise?

IRENE (*picking them up*) I'll bring them. I want to wash, anyhow. (*Goes to door*)

MRS QUEEN (*to BABA*) You'll get on in the world, Miss—if none of the rest of us does (*To IRENE*) After you, Miss

IRENE (*at door*) You go Then I can shut it

MRS QUEEN (*going out with cake*) Thank you, Miss

[*Exit MRS QUEEN*]

MRS McNEIL (*remembering*) Wait a minute, Irene I've got something for you (*She picks up the little fancy box tied with ribbon*)

BABA (*jumping up—her tiredness forgotten*) What is it? (*As IRENE comes back into the room*) Who from?

MRS McNEIL Her grandmother

BABA She had ten shillings from you this morning

MRS McNEIL That was an extra

BABA Can I have two presents?

IRENE (*taking the box*) Thanks most awfully But really, I don't think you ought

MRS McNEIL I wanted you to have something I'd made with my own hands It wasn't quite ready this morning

[*BABA eagerly assists IRENE to untie the ribbon*]

BABA Can I have the ribbon? (*She takes it*)

IRENE (*turning back the tissue paper—and seeing the contents*) Satin And lace

MRS McNEIL Take them out They won't bite you

IRENE (*doing so*) Them? (*She holds up the garment*)

BABA Panties!

IRENE Cami knicks—of satin and lace! Oh, Granny! Just what I've been longing for ever since I grew up

MRS McNEIL (*dryly*) Sorry to have kept you waiting so long

BABA Aren't they too ducky ! Do try them on

IRENE (*as excited as she is*) Shall I ?

BABA I ll come with you

IRENE No You stay here and be one of the public

BABA (*delighted to play act*) Like at one of Mummie's dress parades !

IRENE (*running to the door*) I ll be a mannequin

BABA And I ll be a customer I ll give an order for some just the same

[*Exit* IRENE

IRENE (*off*) Shan t be a minute

BABA (*coaxingly—to her grandmother, nestling against her*) Will you make me a pair for my next birthday ?

MRS McNEIL The one after When you're sixteen

BABA (*with a sigh, counting*) Nearly two years ! It's not fair Irene being so much older than me

MRS McNEIL You ll grow old soon enough

BABA Next year she s to get her fur coat She'll always be having something I haven t

MRS McNEIL (*who knows her BABA*) Not for long Had a nice day at school ?

BABA All right, thank you

MRS McNEIL How's Sister Millicent ?

BABA Quite well, thank you

MRS McNEIL What did you do ?

BABA Nothing much

MRS McNEIL How's Molly Purdell ?

BABA Quite well, thank you.

MRS McNEIL I thought she had a cold ?

BABA (*with complete indifference*) Yes, she has

[*They stay silent for a moment or two—MRS McNEIL smiles a little amused smile—BABA, relaxed against her, stares at nothing*

Enter MRS QUEEN She carries two cartons of ice cream on a small tray

MRS QUEEN (*as she comes in*) Fre s something you don t like

BABA (*without moving*) What ?

MRS QUEEN (*approaching*) If you're too lazy to look I ll cart it away again

BABA (*seeing what s on the tray as MRS QUEEN comes nearer—jumping up*) Ice cream ! Oh Queen one ! How luscious ! You are an angel !

MRS QUEEN Not yet, Miss

BABA (*going to her*) Can I eat mine now ?

MRS QUEEN If you don t go gobbling it down, then wanting some of Miss Irene s

BABA (*taking her share*) Course I shan t (*Opening the carton*) A little papier mache spoon ! How dote y ! When did you get it ?

MRS QUEEN When I run out for the candles They give you a little packet of stuff that keeps it freezing four hours

BABA (*who is beginning, without haste but steadily, to dispose of hers—eating from the outer edge in*) Can we have some for the party ?

MRS QUEEN Cost too much No use providing anything you can t ave two goes of What ave we ere ?

[*Enter IRENE, a girlish woollen dressing gown held round her She has removed her stockings and wears mules instead of her school shoes*

BABA (*scornfully*) That's not like a mannequin ! Take off your dressing gown

IRENE (*taking off gown rather bashfully*) There s not very much of them

MRS QUEEN (*staring appreciatively*) You're right there, Miss

BABA (*also appreciatively*) Lovely short ones—like the naughty ladies in the fashion papers Mummie brings home from Paris

MRS McNEIL I sent to Paris for the pattern

MRS Queen 'Er Ma'll 'ave something to say, Ma'am

MRS McNEIL She will, I'm afraid (*Naughtily*) Thought I might as well be killed for a sheep as a lamb

MRS QUEEN That's right (*To IRENE*) You'll ave to lay 'em by till you go to Buckingham Palace With them underneath, come what may, you won't need to worry what appens (*Glancing up quickly*) Was that my door-bell?

IRENE (*hastily*) Let me get to my room first (*She picks up dressing-gown and puts it on*)

MRS QUEEN (*going to door*) You stop where you are If it s a visitor I ll pop 'em into the dining-room whilst you get by

[*Exit MRS QUEEN*]

BABA (*indicating IRENE's carton*) That's yours

IRENE (*going to table*) What is it?

BABA (*who has finished hers—enviously*) Ice cream

IRENE I feel more like tea at the moment

BABA Might give you a pain after hot tea

IRENE Where's yours?

BABA (*regretfully—rubbing her stomach*) Here

IRENE (*very much the older sister*) Want this?

BABA (*this being beyond her wildest expectations*) Not really?

IRENE It'll have thawed by the time I'm ready

BABA (*taking it—gazing at it, then, her better self coming to the fore, handing it back*) Queen one's got some stuff to keep it from thawing

IRENE (*still the older sister*) Go on Eat it Matter of fact, I'm getting rather past ice cream

BABA (*to whom this is heresy*) You can't be

IRENE Don't feel like it to day, anyhow

[BABA makes no more protest She takes the carton, removes the lid and starts to eat

[Enter MRS QUEEN—her face solemn

MRS QUEEN It's a telegram, Ma'am (*She hands the telegram on a small salver*)

IRENE (*sudden fear in her voice*) A telegram?

MRS McNEIL (*taking the orange envelope from the salver—doing her best to speak casually*) Where are my reading specs?

MRS QUEEN Where did you last 'ave 'em, Ma'am?

MRS McNEIL (*handing the telegram to IRENE*) You open it, dear

[IRENE takes the envelope, fumbles for an instant with the flap, then lets her hands drop

IRENE (*in a stifled voice*) I can't

BABA What's all the fuss about? Can I open it, Granny?

MRS McNEIL (*her eyes on IRENE*) Yes Read out what it says

[They wait while BABA tears open the envelope, takes out the telegram and reads

BABA 'Many happy returns Hope to be with you this evening Love to all Jennifer

[There is a moment of complete silence

IRENE (*presently*) Oh, Granny! (*She goes to her grandmother and sinks down at her knee, burying her face*)

MRS QUEEN (*done out of tragedy, but enjoying the crumbs*) The lad s waiting, Ma'am

MRS McNEIL No answer Give him something for himself Where's my bag ?

MRS QUEEN Don t bother jist now I ll take it out of the ousekeeping

[*Exit* MRS QUEEN

BABA Can we go to the station ?

MRS McNEIL If the train doesn't arrive too late

BABA (*scrutinising telegram*) Doesn t say what time

MRS McNEIL Where was it sent from ?

BABA Paris

MRS McNEIL I can't remember the boat trains Where s the time table ?

IRENE (*raising her head and brushing her hair back with her hand*) In Mother s room—on her desk

MRS McNEIL (*to BABA*) Get it, dear

BABA (*sitting*) Where on the desk ?

IRENE (*rising*) I ll go

MRS McNEIL Let Baba Run along, there's a good girl

IRENE Let me We don't want her papers disturbed

[*Exit* IRENE

BABA (*after IRENE has gone out*) Why couldn t she open the telegram ?

MRS McNEIL When she didn't get a birthday letter she was afraid your mother might be ill again

BABA You told her it was the French post

MRS McNEIL She thought I was only saying it to comfort her

BABA Were you ?

MRS McNEIL I hoped it was true

BABA Wonder what she'll bring us ?

MRS McNEIL Baba, dear ! Isn't it enough that she s coming herself ?

BABA She always brings us something from Paris I just wondered what it d be

[Enter IRENE with A B C She comes into the room turning the pages

IRENE Paris—from Victoria via Folkestone and Boulogne She went by Calais (*Glancing down column*) Vict—Paris—Paris—Vict—— 8 25—3 30 12 noon—7 p m What time is it ?

BABA Twenty minutes past five

IRENE If she caught the early one she should be here by now

MRS McNEIL Trains have been known to be late

IRENE (*indulgently*) As a matter of fact, I can't quite see her getting up in time for the 8 25 You know what she s like in the morning at the best of times

BABA The next one's not too late for us to meet, is it ?

MRS McNEIL Not if Mrs Queen can go with you

BABA (*who knows she can manage that all right—to IRENE*) What shall we wear ?

IRENE (*at random*) Brown suits, yellow shirts, brown beaver hats ?

BABA I'd rather our grey They're newer

IRENE (*happily*) Whatever you like I don't care (*Taking BABA and swinging her round and round the room*) Isn't it gorgeous ? Isn't it heavenly ? Oh, happy day ! Let's do a Highland fling !

[BABA responds readily They sing a tune at the top of their voices, dancing the steps of the Highland

fling with gusto MRS McNEIL, *delighted at the turn of events, looks on, also humming the tune*

Enter MRS QUEEN

MRS QUEEN (*also delighted*) That's the way ! (*Clapping her hands in time to the dance*) That's the Scotch blood showing up in you ! (*As they pause exhausted*) Who told you of a pleasant surprise ? Eh ? (*To MRS McNEIL*) What d'you think she'd fancy for dinner ?

MRS McNEIL What have we in the house ?

MRS QUEEN You and the young ladies was 'aving poached egg on spinich with baked apple and custard to follow

BABA Pour y custard ?

MRS QUEEN Yes, Miss

BABA (*reassured—to IRENE*) Let s go and get ready

MRS McNEIL There's no hurry It doesn't take you more than ten minutes to get to Victoria

IRENE We'd like to be there early Don't want to risk missing her

[*As she says this JENNIFER comes in quietly She pauses at the door, surveying them—her eyes shining with pleasure IRENE and BABA see her at the same moment IRENE, unable to believe her eyes, stays rooted to the spot, staring BABA, with a shout, dashes forward, throwing herself at her mother*

BABA Mummie !

JENNIFER (*steadying herself against the onslaught*) My poppet ! (*She embraces BABA while her eyes go over her head to IRENE They smile at one another, a smile of complete accord and sympathy JENNIFER murmurs warmly as their eyes meet*) Darling ! (*After a moment or two JENNIFER's eyes travel on to MRS McNEIL, then to MRS QUEEN Her tone, as she greets them, is more ordinary though full of delight at*

seeing them again) Well, Mother? And you, Mrs Queen?

MRS QUEEN (*finding her voice first*) My word, Madam, I never see sich a change—not in all my born days! (*To MRS MCNEIL*) Ma'am! Did you ever see sich a change?

MRS MCNEIL Wonderful, isn't it?

BABA (*hugging JENNIFER*) Darling, you do look different Quite pretty again

JENNIFER (*amused*) Did you get my wire?

MRS MCNEIL Only just

JENNIFER Oh? It should have been here quite two hours ago (*She comes further into the room, BABA clinging to her arm*)

BABA I had to read it to them Granny hadn't got her right specs Irene was afraid

IRENE (*coming to earth—with a protest*) Baba!

JENNIFER Afraid?

IRENE (*ashamed of her weakness*) Only that it might be to say you were ill again

[JENNIFER, loosening BABA's hold, goes to her

MRS MCNEIL (*helping IRENE out*) When she didn't have any word for her birthday—

JENNIFER (*an arm round IRENE—contrite*) It's terribly thoughtless of me not to have wired earlier I had planned to travel overnight and say many happy returns before the postman got here this morning That's why I didn't write

BABA What kept you?

JENNIFER (*prevaricating*) Several things Didn't get to Paris in time to go to the model houses yesterday and— Oh, you know It always takes longer than one thinks

IRENE We didn't even know you'd left Cannes You've only been there two weeks instead of three?

JENNIFER I had an S O S from "Bouchonniers" Some of the others are away with flu I felt I oughtn't to stop any longer now I'm so well

MRS McNEIL Seems a pity when it was doing you so much good

JENNIFER I was afraid they might have to get someone in my place now the Season's beginning Couldn't risk that, could I? And really, I'm quite, quite myself again I'd probably have come in any event (*One arm round IRENE, the other round BABA*) I meant all along to try to be here on Irene's birthday

[IRENE's eyes kindle at this

(*Glancing from one to the other*) I see someone's taken good care of my babies

MRS QUEEN Think they're looking all right, Madam?

JENNIFER I do, indeed Seldom seen either of them look better (*Touching BABA's head*) Touch wood! (*BABA giggles JENNIFER releases herself and puts an arm round MRS McNEIL*) How are you, Mother? How are the old knees?

MRS McNEIL (*with a grin*) As well as can be expected, thanks

JENNIFER (*kissing her gently*) How I wish you would follow the sun all the year round

MRS McNEIL I don't Not unless you could all come with me

BABA (*with a giggle*) Wouldn't it be fun—us all running madly after the sun?

MRS QUEEN 'Spect you'll be wanting a cup of tea, Madam?

JENNIFER No, thanks I've had some already

MRS QUEEN (*going to door*) I'll put the kettle on just the same What about your luggage? 'As anyone seen to it?

JENNIFER I haven't got it with me It's being fetched from the station

MRS QUEEN Very good, Madam

JENNIFER I'll come to the kitchen in a minute or two

MRS QUEEN You'll be welcome

[Exit MRS QUEEN]

BABA Who's fetching your luggage?

JENNIFER (*tweaking her ear*) Still as inquisitive? A friend

BABA Anyone we know?

JENNIFER No Someone I met at the Van Vorlens'

BABA Male or female?

JENNIFER Male

BABA What's he like?

JENNIFER You'll see presently

IRENE Is he coming with it himself?

JENNIFER Yes

IRENE I'd better clear out and get into some clothes

JENNIFER No hurry He can't be here for another half hour at least Has to go through the Customs (*Indicating IRENE's dressing gown*) But why this?

BABA Oh, do show Mummie!

[IRENE, *watching her mother's face to see the effect, takes off her dressing gown and pirouettes to display herself*]

JENNIFER (*suitably impressed*) Oh, my pet! Really, I must say!

IRENE and BABA (*more or less together*) Granny made them (*They entwine little fingers and wish—each naming a poet*) Keats—Tennyson

JENNIFER (*with a twinkle—to MRS McNEIL*) I'm

surprised at you, Mother After me taking such pains to keep them in long cloth and ashes

MRS McNEIL I knew I'd get into trouble

JENNIFER They are rather nice

BABA She got ten shillings from Granny as well

JENNIFER (*to IRENE*) Come closer Let me look at the embroidery (*IRENE goes willingly*

JENNIFER *examines the handwork—to MRS McNEIL*) You've done it quite perfectly

MRS McNEIL (*pleased*) I thought I might aspire to doing some for the shops

JENNIFER (*doubtfully*) They pay so little for handwork It's sweated labour really What are you doing, Baba ?

BABA (*who has pulled her jibbah over her head and now stands in her blouse and school knickers*) Let me try them on I want to feel the satin next my bare skin

IRENE They aren't your size

BABA That doesn't matter (*Beginning to undo her blouse*)

IRENE If you really must, let's go to our own room

BABA It's so cold in there No one'll see you You can slip them off under your dressing gown (*She picks up IRENE's dressing gown and gives it to her*)

[*Enter MRS QUEEN*]

MRS QUEEN (*announcing*) Sir John Corbett, Madam

IRENE (*startled*) Oh, Queen-one, no ! (*She struggles hurriedly into her gown*)

BABA (*with a shriek—almost in the same breath*) Not a man ! Don't let a man come in here ! (*She hastily takes cover behind her grandmother's chair*)

MRS QUEEN (*as she sees what's happening*) Oh, Miss ! (*Over her shoulder—hurriedly*) Excuse me, Sir If you please, Sir, the young ladies—— !

JENNIFER (*with an amused laugh—going to the door*) Just a minute, John Go into the dining room, will you ? I didn't expect you so soon

MRS QUEEN This way, Sir (*She disappears, presumably leading the way to the dining room*)

JENNIFER (*who is waiting by the half open door—into the room, over her shoulder*) Come along The coast's clear

BABA (*emerging*) That was a narrow shave, wasn't it ?

IRENE (*who is by now well encased in her dressing-gown*) All right for you You re only a kid

BABA My knickers are so ugly

JENNIFER (*amused*) Run along Get into your things and come back as soon as you can

[IRENE and BABA make for the door As they reach it MRS QUEEN appears She speaks to IRENE

MRS QUEEN Oh, Miss, I am sorry What with the excitement of Madam coming it quite slipped my mind you was still in your dressing-gown

IRENE (*as she goes*) No harm done.

[Exit IRENE

MRS QUEEN (*to BABA*) And you undressed too, Miss !

BABA Shouldn't 've cared if I'd been wearing satin and lace, like Irene

MRS McNEIL Baba ! What next ?

[Exit BABA

BABA (*off*) Well, I shouldn't

JENNIFER (*laughing*) Now we know ! (*To MRS QUEEN*) I'll tell Sir John

MRS QUEEN Thank you, Madam——

[Exit JENNIFER

MRS QUEEN *comes into the room, straightens things expertly, speaking to MRS McNEIL as she does so*

—I never was so floored ' To put Miss Irene to an affront like that I am ashamed of myself

MRS McNEIL Don't let it worry you She'll quite understand

MRS QUEEN (*brightening*) Miss Baba does grow a young caution She ll not get left He s a nice gentleman, Ma'am

MRS McNEIL (*putting away the mending*) Is he ?

MRS QUEEN What s more, 'e is a gentleman Shall I get out the whiskey ?

MRS McNEIL Yes, please

[MRS QUEEN *goes to the corner cupboard, bringing out a bottle and a syphon*

MRS QUEEN I'll 'ave to go and fetch some glasses (*As voices approach*) Ere they come

[*She puts on the mask and bearing of a trained servant, goes to door and draws aside as JENNIFER, followed by SIR JOHN, enters*

JENNIFER (*as they come in*) It doesn't really matter I have something to wear

SIR JOHN I 'phoned my man to meet the next train They should be on that

JENNIFER Mother, this is Sir John Corbett—my mother, Mrs McNeil

[Exit MRS QUEEN

MRS McNEIL *gives SIR JOHN a quick appraising glance and evidently likes what she sees She smiles cordially as he goes to her—holding out a hand as he approaches*

MRS McNEIL How do you do ?

SIR JOHN (*shaking hands*) I m afraid I owe you an apology

MRS McNEIL It's the other way round

SIR JOHN How do you think your daughter s looking ?

MRS McNEIL The change is miraculous

SIR JOHN (*his eyes on JENNIFER*) It is, isn t it ?

JENNIFER (*quickly—to cover her embarrassment*)
Sir John saw me at my worst He was at the station with Madeleine to meet me

MRS McNEIL (*to SIR JOHN*) You were staying, too, at the Chateau Apaizer ?

SIR JOHN They re old friends of mine

[*Enter MRS QUEEN with three glasses on a small tray*]

JENNIFER (*introducing her*) This is Mrs Queen who s been with us since Baba was born

SIR JOHN How do you do ?

MRS QUEEN (*at ease, but “ knowing her place ”*)
Sir

SIR JOHN I ve heard a lot about you

MRS QUEEN To my credit, I ope, Sir ?

SIR JOHN Shouldn t be too sure

MRS QUEEN (*setting down tray and adding the whiskey and syphon*) Well, Sir, we can only be as the Lord made us Is that all you require, Madam ?

JENNIFER I think so

MRS QUEEN Thank you, Madam

[*Exit MRS QUEEN*]

JENNIFER (*to SIR JOHN*) Help yourself

SIR JOHN (*going to table*) For you, Mrs McNeil ?

MRS McNEIL I'm not supposed to (*As he pours out the whiskey*) Not too much soda Thanks

SIR JOHN (*taking the drink to her, speaking to JENNIFER*) For you? (*As she shakes her head in refusal*) Do you good after the journey

JENNIFER Don't like the taste I prefer the drinks they give you in France No, really! I feel quite—(*with a quick little smile at him*) “happy” enough as it is

[SIR JOHN, *mixing his own drink, answers her smile* He then salutes MRS McNEIL with his glass

MRS McNEIL *acknowledges this* They drink

MRS McNEIL Did you have a good crossing?

JENNIFER Delightful

MRS McNEIL Wasn't the Channel rather rough?

SIR JOHN We didn't see it We were above the clouds till just before landing

JENNIFER (*knowing it has to come out*) We came by air

MRS McNEIL You mean you flew over?

JENNIFER Yes (*Seeing her mother's face*) Not so rash as it sounds, darling I had the foresight to take out a special insurance against accident

MRS McNEIL Do you think that would have consoled us if there'd been one?

JENNIFER I had to do something to celebrate this glorious “born again” feeling

SIR JOHN Afraid it's my fault, Mrs McNeil I persuaded her

JENNIFER I wouldn't have missed it for the world It's the most exciting thing I've done for years and years

MRS McNEIL (*quietly*) I don't know that you're entitled to risk your life for the sake of excitement

JENNIFER (*giving her mother a light kiss on the top of her head*) Don't be cross Next time you shall come too

MRS McNEIL (*allowing herself to smile*) I must admit I'd like the experience

JENNIFER (*triumphantly*) A-ha ! I thought so

MRS McNEIL It would be a different matter if we were all together

SIR JOHN I won't let her do it again without your permission

[*There is the sound of BABA's breathless giggle, checked by an admonition in undertone from IRENE
This is followed by silence*]

JENNIFER (to SIR JOHN) The preliminary——

[*SIR JOHN glances toward the door expectantly
The door opens IRENE and BABA—their manner quite perfect—come into the room JENNIFER, with a little smile, meets them half-way*]

*Enter IRENE and BABA They wear their grey
As with all their clothes these are well cut and simple*

—Come and be introduced This is Sir John Corbett—my elder girl, Irene

IRENE (*holding out a hand to SIR JOHN*) How do you do ?

[*They give each other a steady look then smile simultaneously*]

SIR JOHN (*shaking hands*) I must apologise for my untimely appearance

IRENE (*politely*) Not at all It's our fault for using the sitting-room as a dressing room

JENNIFER And Baba——

SIR JOHN (*as BABA gives him her hand*) How do you do ?

BABA (*who has looked at him unblinkingly since she came in*) Quite well, thank you

[*Enter MRS QUEEN*]

MRS QUEEN Excuse me, Madam

JENNIFER Yes, Mrs Queen ?

MRS QUEEN Dinner, Madam ? I'll 'ave to get on and give the order before the shops shut

JENNIFER Can t we manage with whatever you ve got in the house ?

MRS QUEEN The others was aying poached egg on spinich with baked apple and custard to follow

BABA (*with quiet satisfaction*) Pour y

JENNIFER I don t know that that ll be enough if— (*She turns to SIR JOHN*) —Can you stay and have an early meal with us ?

SIR JOHN May I make a suggestion ? Why not all come out and have dinner with me ? (*He takes in the girls as he speaks*) We might get seats for a theatre

[IRENE and BABA stare at him incredulously, then at each other MRS QUEEN s face lights up in sympathy

JENNIFER It's most awfully good of you But I think not

[IRENE and BABA stare at her appealingly unable to keep the cloud of disappointment from their faces MRS QUEEN looks anxious

SIR JOHN As it s a birthday ? It d give me very great pleasure

JENNIFER (*seeing he means it*) Well—as it's a birthday—

[IRENE and BABA breathe again MRS QUEEN looks frankly delighted

IRENE (*her eyes shining—to SIR JOHN*) Thank you

BABA (*scarcely able to utter*) Thank you

MRS QUEEN Will that mean their party frocks, Madam ?

JENNIFER Yes

MRS QUEEN I'll go and put me iron on

[Exit MRS QUEEN, *exuding satisfaction*]

SIR JOHN (*pleased—entering into it boyishly*)
What play would you like to see? You, Mrs McNeil

MRS McNEIL Me? I shan't be with you

IRENE Oh, Granny, why not?

BABA You must, Granny

JENNIFER Do come, Mother

MRS McNEIL I'm so slow on my feet

SIR JOHN (*joining the chorus*) You won't be expected to run races My car will take you from door to door You have no excuse

MRS McNEIL (*with a smile of assent—to SIR JOHN*) In that case——' Thank you (*Glancing at IRENE*) Isn't it for Irene to choose the play—as it's her birthday?

IRENE (*as they wait for her to speak—politely, to SIR JOHN*) What have you seen already?

SIR JOHN Never mind about me What have you?

JENNIFER That's quite easy (*To her family*) Don't suppose any of you've been to a theatre while I've been away? (*As they nod their heads in negation*) And certainly not while I was ill We're in the happy position of having practically the whole list to choose from

BABA (*unable to keep it in any longer*) We're all dying to see *Richard of Bordeaux* (*Or whatever likely play is popular at the moment*)

SIR JOHN (*nobly*) Do you know, that happens to be the very play I want to see too?

IRENE (*believing him—delighted*) Is it? Is it really?

SIR JOHN I think the Berkeley for dinner, don't you?

BABA Oh yes !

IRENE Yes, rather !

SIR JOHN What time—seven fifteen ?

BABA (*who always knows this sort of thing*) The play begins at half past eight

IRENE Whatever we do, we mustn't be late

BABA Oh Lord, no !

SIR JOHN Better make it seven

MRS McNEIL (*knowing how important it is*) I think quarter to would be safer

IRENE So do I

BABA (*now completely at home with SIR JOHN*) That'll give us plenty of time to eat a lot !

IRENE Baba !

BABA (*pulling herself up*) Sorry !

SIR JOHN (*to JENNIFER*) I ought to get on at once to Keith Prowse

JENNIFER (*glancing*) Where's the telephone ?
(*Over L*)

MRS McNEIL I had it in the dining room

BABA (*rather boastfully*) We have the sort you can cart about and plug into the wall Because of Granny's rheumatism Shall I get it for you ?

SIR JOHN I'll go into the other room, if I may I have several calls to make

BABA (*already at door*) I'll show you the way

JENNIFER Sir John knows where the dining-room is, Baba

BABA (*to SIR JOHN, as he goes*) Do you ?

SIR JOHN Yes, thanks

[*Exit SIR JOHN*]

BABA (*on tenterhooks*) I'd better go and start to get ready You know what a time I take

IRENE Don't be too long in the bathroom

BABA Shan't be two ticks

[Exit BABA]

JENNIFER (*calling after her*) Wash yourself properly

MRS McNEIL (*who has been putting away her things, making an effort to rise*) Be a dear, Irene Help me to get started

[IRENE hurries over to her grandmother, assists her to rise, then holds an arm for her to lean on]

IRENE Straighten yourself, darling (*As Mrs McNEIL makes a not too successful effort to do so*) You've been sitting in one position too long

MRS McNEIL (*as they start to go to the door slowly*) I'm afraid I have

IRENE (*as they progress*) Done your exercise ?

MRS McNEIL (*guiltily*) No

JENNIFER Can I help ?

MRS McNEIL One s enough, thanks

IRENE You know what Dr Sloane said ? You were to do them every morning without fail

MRS McNEIL I'd like to make Dr Sloane a present of my back and knees and see if he'd do his exercise

[Exit MRS McNEIL]

IRENE (*after watching her start down the passage—coming back into the room*) Poor Granny I hate being severe with her

JENNIFER (*hiding a little smile*) She knows it's for her own good

IRENE (*going to her mother and laying a cheek against hers*) I'm so glad to have you back again

JENNIFER (*pleased*) Are you ?

[They stay like this for a moment or two, then IRENE with a joyous movement throws her arms round her mother]

IRENE Oh, darling, isn't life wonderful !

CURTAIN

SCENE II

The same The same night

When the curtain rises the room is in darkness except for the glow of the fire

Enter MRS QUEEN She is carrying a tray of drinks—whiskey and soda and home made lemonade—which she places on the table nearest the door Then she crosses to the grate, puts more coal on the fire and is about to tidy the hearth when the front door bell starts to ring It keeps on ringing steadily

MRS QUEEN *(to herself)* Miss Baba !

[She goes quickly from the room, leaving the door open From the passage her voice comes, raised in admonition]

Coming—coming ! 'Ave patience

[This is followed by the sound of the front door being opened and the cessation of the bell-ringing MRS QUEEN'S voice comes from the distance]

Knew it was you, Miss, the way the bell kep' on ringing Where s the rest of them ?

BABA *(also distant)* Lift s broken down again They're getting Granny up by degrees

MRS QUEEN 'Ad a good time ?

BABA *'(approaching)* Simply heavenly !

MRS QUEEN *(as they come in)* Drat that lift ! Would be up to its tricks the one day the pore old lady 'as a night out

[Enter BABA and MRS QUEEN]

BABA (*who looks delightful in her party frock and cloak—holding out a very large box of chocolates*)
Look what he gave me

MRS QUEEN Oh, Miss ! What a big box

BABA (*removing the lid*) Have one ?

MRS QUEEN (*glancing in—her fingers hovering*)
Don't mind if I do My, what beauties !

BABA (*generously*) Have all that row They're
the kind I don't like

MRS QUEEN (*making her choice*) This'll do to go
on with Well ! Tell us all about it ! What did
they give you to eat ?

BABA Gorgeous things ! (*She helps herself to a chocolate*) We had oysters to start off with

MRS QUEEN You didn't never eat oysters ?

BABA Yes, I did They were lovely and slippery
Then *sole délice*—with white wine, sauce
and skinned grapes—

MRS QUEEN (*nettled*) I know—I know You
don't 'ave to teach me I seen many a good sole
marred that way

BABA Then there was saddle of lamb Didn't
bother about that Just ate it Then Irene
and I couldn't decide whether to have *crêpes*
Suzette or *soufflé surprise* They were having
crêpes Suzette at the next table It took three
waiters to make them So we thought as we'd
seen that we'd have a look at *soufflé surprise*
(*Closing her eyes and rubbing her stomach*) Too
luscious ! Cold ice cream inside a hot outside,
fluffy and browned in the oven, with hot chocolate
sauce poured all over

MRS QUEEN (*jealously*) It's nothing but what
I could do for you if I'd the right implements
And the theatre ?

BABA (*her trump card*) We sat in a box

MRS QUEEN (*impressed*) You didn't ! Could

you see all right ? I 'ave 'eard tell, from a box
you miss what's going on one side of the stage

BABA I and Granny and Irene saw every
thing We only had to lean out Mummie and
Mr Corbett didn't mind as they'd just been
away

MRS QUEEN (*who has been listening*) There's
their voices 'Tis too bad, 'aving to walk up all
them stairs And him used to things What'll 'e
think of us ?

BABA I wish we lived in a decent flat

MRS QUEEN So you do, Miss Your Ma pays
a disgraceful lot for the rent

BABA With a proper lift and a porter in
uniform, like at Molly Purdell's

MRS QUEEN You never know P raps and so
you may one of these days Before so very long
too

BABA Don't see how, unless Irene or I marries
a rich man We shan't be ready for that for
several more years

MRS QUEEN (*mysteriously*) It may not depend
on neither of you

BABA (*eagerly*) Have you been cutting the
cards ?

MRS QUEEN That's telling ! Must just go n
give the old lady a and She'll be fair done

[Exit MRS QUEEN

*There is the sound of voices in the distance BABA
chooses another chocolate, puts it into her mouth,
wipes her fingers on her knickers—which match her
frock—realises too late that they aren't her everyday
ones, takes her handkerchief from the elastic and
rubs the place clean This keeps her occupied till
IRENE appears*

Enter IRENE

IRENE Hello ! Thought you were going straight to bed ?

BABA I'm not sleepy

IRENE You were yawning all the way home

BABA It's worn off by now

IRENE You'll never be able to get up in time for school in the morning (*As BABA gazes into the box again*) Don't eat any more chocolates You'll be sick

BABA Just this one I can wash it down with a long drink of water I like him, don't you ?

IRENE Who's ' him ' ?

BABA You know—Sir John

IRENE (*with enthusiasm*) Yes ! He's most awfully kind

BABA Such fun, too I like when he laughs Not a bit like an old person

IRENE He isn't old

BABA He's got grey hair at the sides

[*Enter JENNIFER She looks very lovely in evening dress and wrap She is smiling*]

JENNIFER Well, my babies ? (*Coming into the room*) Enjoyed yourselves ?

BABA It was simply heavenly

IRENE (*going to her mother so that they are in close proximity*) It was the loveliest time I've ever had

JENNIFER (*pleased—caressing her hair*) So glad, darling

BABA Has he gone ?

JENNIFER Do use people's names, darling No, he hasn't

BABA Having a wash and brush up ?

JENNIFER Yes

BABA He is a pet lamb Quite the nicest man
I've met so far

IRENE (*as she and her mother have a little smile at
BABA's expense*) I think so too

JENNIFER (*obviously delighted by their enthusiasm*)
So glad you like him

IRENE Don't see how anyone could help it
Do you?

JENNIFER No, I don't

IRENE (*nestling against her mother*) You do smell
nice What is it?

JENNIFER Chanel's latest (*As BABA yawns*)
Granny's gone to her room Don't you think it's
time you went to yours?

BABA (*reluctantly*) Perhaps I'd better

JENNIFER (*kissing her*) Good night, poppet

BABA Good night You too, Irene

IRENE In a minute

BABA (*going to the door—as she goes out yawning*)
I hope he comes here a lot We could do with
more men about

[*Exit BABA*]

JENNIFER (*unable to help laughing—but meaning it*)
What that child needs is to be sent away to a
really strict boarding school You all spoil her
(*Sit*)

IRENE So do you, you know

JENNIFER It's not so easy to be a stern parent
when I see so little of you

IRENE (*gazing at her mother*) You did look
lovely to night

JENNIFER (*pleased*) Did I?

IRENE Not a bit like a mother

JENNIFER How *do* mothers look?

IRENE Well—when they think no one's watching—sort of—responsible

JENNIFER That's "gas, light, and coke" !

IRENE (*sympathetically*) I know Speaking of that, there's something I want to talk to you about When we're alone

JENNIFER Go ahead

IRENE Not to night To morrow When we've time for a real heart to heart

JENNIFER Sounds rather serious Not worrying about anything, I hope ?

IRENE Not now you're better (*With a fierce little hug*) I'm never going to let you get ill again—never

JENNIFER (*touched—on a purposely light note—sniff*) Who's the responsible one now ? Eh ?

IRENE Quite time I was I'm old enough

JENNIFER Don't try to grow up too soon I'd rather you didn't

IRENE Someone's got to take care of you

JENNIFER (*pause—smiling*) Had a nice birthday ?

IRENE Since you came home I was too worried before It's been all the lovelier When you don't expect a nice surprise it's ever so much nicer isn't it ?

JENNIFER And when you don't expect a nasty one it's ever so much nastier—eh ?

IRENE Heaven knows what I did expect ! You looked so awful when you went away I began to imagine— (*She gives a little shudder*) I mustn't think of it Here you are—looking better than I've ever seen you in my whole life

JENNIFER And feeling as if I could jump over the moon ! That's enough about me (*Remembering*) Oh, my trunk's arrived Mrs Queen has unpacked Your presents on my bed

IRENE (*with happy anticipation*) Is it ?

JENNIFER I expect you know what it is ?

IRENE No, I don't

JENNIFER Something we were saving up to get you next year

IRENE (*incredulously*) Not the fur coat ?

JENNIFER Yes—the fur coat

IRENE (*her eyes shining*) Oh, Mummie ! Wasn't it the most terrible extravagance ?

JENNIFER Yes But I just couldn't resist it

IRENE (*with another rapturous hug*) You absolute angel ! I shall treasure it for the rest of my days

JENNIFER It won't last for ever

IRENE Yes, it will I shall wear it first as a long coat, then—it is a long coat, isn't it ?

JENNIFER Yes

IRENE Then as a short one, then as a stole, then as a little tippet, then as bits of trimming That'll take me the rest of my days When I'm an old lady I'll have little blobs of it plastered all over me You know how they do ! (*With another ecstatic little hug*) Oh, you darling !

[Enter SIR JOHN *He pauses as he sees them*

JENNIFER (*an arm still round IRENE—disengaging herself*) Come and have a drink

SIR JOHN (*coming into the room*) How's Mrs McNeil after her strenuous climb ?

JENNIFER Mrs Queen's looking after her

IRENE She'll feel it to-morrow

SIR JOHN A pity she has to suffer like that Can't anything be done for her ?

JENNIFER Apparently not

SIR JOHN Have you got a good doctor ?

JENNIFER Yes The one who looked after me when I was ill

SIR JOHN I'd like to meet him

IRENE If you come here much you're sure to

SIR JOHN Who's the attraction?

JENNIFER (*with a smile*) He's an old friend of the family Brought these two into the world

IRENE We always tease Granny about him

SIR JOHN (*to whom this sounds as it should be*)
Your grandmother?

JENNIFER He belongs to her generation

IRENE They delve into the past together

SIR JOHN (*appeased*) You want a younger man

JENNIFER I don't think so He's not a bit set in his ways

IRENE I'll say good night

JENNIFER Sleepy?

IRENE Not really But I'm simply dying to see—you know?

JENNIFER Sir John knows all about it

IRENE (*drawing him into their intimacy with a quick smile*) Does he?

JENNIFER (*by way of enlightenment—to SIR JOHN*)
The fur coat (*To IRENE*) He helped choose it

IRENE (*pleased*) Did he?

JENNIFER He has very good taste

IRENE I'm sure he has (*To SIR JOHN*) Thanks so much for being interested

SIR JOHN I'm the one to say thanks It was quite an event

IRENE (*politely*) It's very nice of you to put it like that You don't know how thrilled I am Really this is a red letter day! I was telling Mother, to night's the loveliest treat I've ever had I shall always remember it I hope we weren't too much for you

SIR JOHN (*pleased*) On the contrary I don't know when I've enjoyed myself more (*Up*)

IRENE So glad it wasn't all on our side (*A young girl again—to JENNIFER*) Good night, darling

JENNIFER (*taking IRENE'S head between her hands and kissing her on the forehead*) Good night, my sweet (*Up*)

IRENE (*with a shy young smile—to SIR JOHN*) Good night

[SIR JOHN opens the door IRENE and he smile at each other

IRENE (*at the door*) Don't let her sit up too late

SIR JOHN I won't—

JENNIFER It's all right I'm not going to work in the morning Going to be a lady for one more day

IRENE So glad

[*Exit IRENE*

SIR JOHN *waits a moment then closes the door and comes back into the room There is a suggestion of nervous tension between them*

SIR JOHN Nice child (*To fire*)

JENNIFER Scarcely a child now She's growing up, I'm afraid

SIR JOHN She adores you

JENNIFER She is rather maternal about me, isn't she?

SIR JOHN I like to see it These days Children are apt to be so very detached

JENNIFER I suppose we—as a family—have been at closer quarters than most Then with them going to a day school We've led a very simple life, really

SIR JOHN Certainly nothing *blasé* about them I liked the whole hearted way they gave themselves up to the evening

JENNIFER A treat's still a treat Perhaps I've erred rather much on the other side I didn't want them to get too used to excitement Don't know that it's done much for Baba She's a natural hedonist Give me a cigarette, will you? (*As SIR JOHN feels for his case*) Not your own There should be lots about somewhere—

[SIR JOHN *takes a cigarette from his own case, lights it and hands it to her Their hands touch They look into each other's eyes SIR JOHN takes the cigarette and stubs it out on the nearest ash tray They are still looking at one another He takes her into his arms JENNIFER tries to free herself*

—No Please Not here— Not now

SIR JOHN (*holding her*) I've been waiting all day for this

JENNIFER (*with a little excited laugh*) Don't be absurd

SIR JOHN (*watching her mouth*) Absurd? (*With an intimate smile*) After last night?

JENNIFER (*sighing*) We were in Paris last night

SIR JOHN (*still holding her*) What difference does that make?

JENNIFER All the difference in the world (*Striving to keep a flippant note*) We were—a little drunk with rather expensive music and rather expensive wine There were flattering shades on the lights

SIR JOHN Is that what made you look so adorable?

JENNIFER To day we're in London There's an unbecoming chill in the air

SIR JOHN (*still gazing at her*) I don't notice it

JENNIFER Open your eyes

SIR JOHN And you—keep your promise

JENNIFER My promise ? (*Freeing herself—seriously*) Do you realise what you're asking ?
(*Cross R*)

SIR JOHN I do

JENNIFER Do you honestly—in cold blood—mean that you want me to *marry* you ?

SIR JOHN Honestly Not in cold blood

JENNIFER (*laughs*) You've seen my family ?

SIR JOHN And a very nice family

JENNIFER I think so too But whoever takes me has to take them as well

SIR JOHN I know it

JENNIFER What would you do if I were mean enough to take you at your word ?

SIR JOHN (*with simple sincerity*) ' Give thanks unto the Lord from whom all blessings flow '

JENNIFER (*touched—but still feeling obliged to protest*) You're infatuated just now It's part of the glamour—the sun—the South—the blue sea

SIR JOHN But you *were* happy last night ?
Jennifer ? Tell me the truth Were you happy last night ?

JENNIFER Yes

SIR JOHN (*hoping for a denial*) Only with the aid of ' rather expensive music and rather expensive wine ' ?

JENNIFER Perhaps (*As she sees his disappointment*) It's having someone to share them with

SIR JOHN That should be easy for you ?

JENNIFER You're wrong there It's not easy We blame a lot on the War But there is a dearth of men with whom women past the age of thirty five can enjoy music and wine The few there are are married and deceiving their wives

SIR JOHN (*with a touch of cynicism*) Doesn't that add spice to the adventure ?

JENNIFER Not for me It prohibits it (*Short pause*) I've been the wife (*Away R*)

SIR JOHN (*surprised*) You ? I thought your marriage had been that rare thing—a Romance

JENNIFER Who told you ?

SIR JOHN Our hostess at Chateau Apaïser

JENNIFER So you talked me over with Madeleine ?

SIR JOHN Not so crudely as that She guessed how it was with me

JENNIFER I don't mind But you know Madeleine ? In spite of two divorces and a third pending, she's incurably sentimental As some one rather aptly put it, she'll always come pure to marriage " It's the American strain in her (*Sits R*)

[SIR JOHN *laughs, then becomes serious again*

SIR JOHN (*presently*) I'm sorry

JENNIFER What for ?

SIR JOHN Since we met, two weeks ago, I've pictured you at every age and at every stage of your life I was glad to think you'd had a few years of romance

JENNIFER Don't You make me want to cry

SIR JOHN (*gently*) Then cry, my dear

JENNIFER (*with a little laugh*) Talk about asking for trouble ! First you invite me to marry you then you invite me to cry Rather too rash, don't you think ?

SIR JOHN I'll risk it

JENNIFER (*after a moment or two*) It was a romance If Jim had been killed during the War instead of afterwards, I'd have the most—(*she feels for a word*)—gallant memories But we'd

lived too long on our nerves. Our marriage had been a series of feverish meetings, hectic days and nights, agonised partings. We were so terribly afraid each time together might be our last. Then for him France again, for me, the awful waiting for news. I used to pray he'd be wounded, no matter how badly, so that I could nurse him and show him my devotion. If he were killed I meant to die too. When we came to after the Armistice we looked about for a home. Jim had come into a cushy job with the old family firm. We were able to afford an extravagant little house in a mews—such fun to decorate and furnish—not quite so much fun to live in. There was no space, no fresh air. Irene was born. (*Short pause*) I don't know which Jim came to loathe more, the sight of the nurse or the pram. I'd had a pretty bad time. For quite a while I couldn't dance or play games. There were lots of other girls waiting to—pretty girls without men of their own. Ready for anything. I got jealous, we had rows. I knew it was fatal, but never seemed to be able to stop myself asking 'Where he was going,' or 'Where had he been?' I found out he lied. We had worse rows. I took to crying a lot. That's why I said you were rash. When I got stronger, I pulled myself together of course—wiped my eyes, got new clothes. Jim fell in love again with his own wife. Soon I managed to make quite a reputation for the sort of staccato brightness that passed at that time for wit. It was too easy. One simply had to sweep aside everything that one had been brought up to esteem. When I discovered that I was in for another baby, I was ashamed to tell Jim. When I did, it was in the approved cynical tone. He agreed I'd been inexcusably careless. We had another row because I refused to get rid of it. This time I encouraged him to go off on his own. (*Short pause*) Soon after Baba was born, he was killed.

in a motor smash—several of them rather tight coming home from a party, speeding all out on the road. The coroner, who'd had rather a dose of that sort of thing, made it clear that he for one thought it good riddance—bad rubbish, you know. But Jim wasn't rubbish. Neither were the others. They were just young people who'd seen through life too soon. (*She pauses a moment, then her composure deserts her. With a sudden movement she hides her face. Her voice quivers and breaks.*) It's—all too sad to remember.

SIR JOHN I know. I was thoughtless enough to come home one day without giving due notice. There was a Red tab's ' hat in the hall. He'd been using my shaving brush. Might have overlooked it if he hadn't done that. Matter of fact they're much better suited. Last time I dined with them, I was particularly impressed how well suited they are. Both cheat at bridge.

JENNIFER (*with the laugh he has worked for*) Not really?

SIR JOHN Well, you know. Put more politely, they understand one another's game. Hand some woman. Looks well in her clothes.

JENNIFER (*pouncing on this*) Tell her to get them at Bouchonner's. She must ask for me.

SIR JOHN Don't think I should. If I remember right, her dressmaker didn't have it too easy.

JENNIFER I expect to work for my living.

SIR JOHN What would you get out of it?

JENNIFER I more or less depend on commission. I get a salary of course. Nothing like enough to live as we do. Not that we're extravagant. What with school fees and rent! We ought to live in a suburb. But I like to feel they're near, if I'm wanted.

SIR JOHN (*compassionately*) Mother and father! It's too much for you.

JENNIFER Not when I'm well

SIR JOHN What if you lose that job ?

JENNIFER I look about for another

SIR JOHN Not so easy to find, are they ?

JENNIFER Don't rub it in That's my nightmare

SIR JOHN Is there no one to help ? No relations ?

JENNIFER Mine can't do anything Every single thing that's happened in the last fifteen years has hit them just where they live Jim's family were mixed up with Kreugers

SIR JOHN Most of us were—one way or another Now look here, I'm not a rich man, but——

JENNIFER You behaved like one to-night !

SIR JOHN —but so long as people are stupid enough to go to law about things they could settle in their own drawing rooms I shall go on making rather more than is decent I've a bit put by too—in a stocking

JENNIFER Surely you've got poor relations ?

SIR JOHN Singularly free—from any sort My only sister's quite comfortable Her kids'll have as much as is good for 'em (*Pause*) Well ?

JENNIFER Well ?

SIR JOHN What about it ? It's not the sun, Jennifer Or the South Or the blue sea The first minute I saw you——

JENNIFER Not that morning ? When I got out of the train after travelling—— ?

SIR JOHN Yes

JENNIFER I looked *such* a sight !

SIR JOHN You did Just a poor waif and stray

JENNIFER I felt one A real Dr Barnardo's !

SIR JOHN It's when you feel like that I want to be near you—to have the right to take care of you——

JENNIFER (*a last feeble protest—pause*) I can't give anyone what I gave Jim

SIR JOHN Give me what's left——

[She smiles tremulously at him He gathers her close, his lips on her hair]

—Jennifer

[He puts his lips against hers She responds Their embrace becomes warmer The door opens IRENE, wearing the fur coat, hugging it close to her, starts to come into the room joyously She opens her mouth to speak as she sees them The words freeze on her lips The smile is wiped from her face For an instant she stares as if rooted there Then her hand goes to her mouth to hold back a cry With a look of utter tragedy she turns and goes, drawing the door to behind her as if to shut out a sight too painful to bear]

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE I

*Next afternoon The same room Fading daylight
A bright fire burns in the grate*

The curtain rises on an empty stage Voices can be heard approaching MRS MCNEIL and MRS QUEEN *enter and progress slowly toward MRS MCNEIL'S chair*

MRS QUEEN (*speaking as they come in—MRS MCNEIL leaning on her arm*) No mistake about it, es a peach of a gentleman, Ma am We're lucky to get 'im I mean, tishn't as if she was a young girl (*As they reach the chair*) I knew the minnit I set eyes on er something ad appened Two weeks in France don't do that much Jist because it is France ! Come to that, wot's wrong with Southend ? (*As MRS MCNEIL sits heavily*) As I told you before, Ma am, if you was jist to nip off your shoes and stockings and walk about in that lovely mud at Southend ! I mean it, Ma am If you was jist to give it a try

MRS MCNEIL (*a little breathless with the effort of getting from her bedroom to the sitting room*) Mrs Queen, can you see me walking in mud ? Now if it was Harrogate—

MRS QUEEN And I've me own ideas about 'Arrogate !

MRS MCNEIL Did I finish darning those stockings of Baba's ?

MRS QUEEN (*handing stocking bag*) Lady I live with in ought six—where I was first kitchen-maid—went there to 'er death Doctor did say if it 'adn't bin the end of er it'd of bin the making of 'er for life It was the cold done it She never could do with it cold Even ad to 'ave 'er cup warmed before she could pour out 'er tea Will you 'ave a cup now, Ma am ?

MRS McNEIL (*taking the small clock from her table and glancing at it*) Isn't it too early?

MRS QUEEN You look as if you could do with something to pull you together

MRS McNEIL Mrs Lawrence said she'd be home

MRS QUEEN Shouldn't count on 'er, Ma'am. Not after having lunch with 'er gentleman. She'll be all at sixes and sevens—as is on'y right that she should

MRS McNEIL (*starting to darn BABA's woollen stocking*) She particularly wanted to be back before the children got in from school

MRS QUEEN She knows Thursday's their dancing. Better 'ave a cup, Ma'am. It's them stairs last night done you in. I was mad with that lift. To-day it's going up and down smooth as cream (*Listening*) Talk of the angel! There's 'er key in the lock

[They both glance toward the open door. The hall door can be heard opening and closing. They wait expectantly. There is no further sound.]

MRS McNEIL (*raising her voice a little*) That you, Jennifer?

IRENE (*off*) No, Granny. It's me.

MRS QUEEN (*surprised*) Miss Irene? What's she 'ome so soon for?

MRS McNEIL Perhaps they aren't having their dancing class. Perhaps my clock's wrong.

MRS QUEEN (*going toward door*) I don't 'ear Miss Baba.

[Before she reaches the door IRENE appears. She is making an attempt to seem natural, but can't disguise the pallor of her face. MRS QUEEN pauses and stares at her.]

Why, Miss, what's the matter?

IRENE Nothing. Why should there be?

MRS QUEEN Whatever 'ave you done with your colour ? You look jist like a ghost

IRENE (*with a not too convincing laugh*) I'm not one Anything but !

MRS McNEIL (*who has been watching her anxiously*) Where s Baba ?

IRENE Dancing

MRS QUEEN You ve not left 'er to come 'ome alone ?

IRENE Molly Purdell's M selle's seeing her as far as the door Sister Millicent got it into her head I'm sickening for flu Silly thing !

MRS QUEEN And I m not so sure about that neither

IRENE Don't you start, too

MRS QUEEN Come to think of it, you didn't look too good this morning Never touched a bite of your breakfast

IRENE I hadn t time

MRS QUEEN You'd as much time as ever you ave You was wide awake when I called you Let's ave a peep at your tongue

IRENE (*irritably*) Please don't fuss I m all right —really

MRS McNEIL (*realising that IRENE wants to be left alone*) What about that tea, Mrs Queen ? Sit by the fire for a little while, Irene

IRENE (*gratefully*) It is rather cold, isn't it ?

MRS QUEEN Give me your things (*Takes IRENE's books from her*) Now your coat (*Helps off with coat*)

IRENE And my hat ! (*With an attempt at raillery she takes off her hat and sticks it on MRS QUEEN S head, this giving her an excuse for laughter*)

MRS QUEEN Don't know as I look as comic as all that, Miss

IRENE She does, doesn't she, Granny? Just like the Dame in the Pantomime (*Goes on laughing*)

MRS QUEEN (*eyeing IRENE suspiciously*) I'll go and fetch the thermometer, Ma'am

IRENE (*still laughing weakly*) I haven't got a temperature

MRS QUEEN (*tartly*) We'll soon see about that

[*Exit MRS QUEEN*]

IRENE (*the bubble pricked*) I do wish she'd leave me alone There's absolutely nothing the matter with me

MRS McNEIL (*humouring her*) Just a little bit tired, eh? After last night's dissipation? We're not used to it, that's what it is After the talking to you gave me yesterday I'd made all sorts of good resolutions, instead of which I succumbed to an afternoon nap

IRENE (*who has seated herself wearily*) Feel better for it?

MRS McNEIL I shall presently You know I never was good at going to sleep through the day! It makes me so miserable I forget all my blessings and just remember about being an old woman with no money, dependent on other people for everything Just a nuisance, in fact

IRENE (*her quick sympathy roused*) Oh, Granny, no! How could you say that? Or think it

MRS McNEIL I'm only telling you how I feel after an afternoon nap

[*Enter MRS QUEEN She speaks as she comes in*]

MRS QUEEN 'Ere's the thermometer, Miss Open your mouth

IRENE No—please

MRS QUEEN (*adamant*) Open your mouth

IRENE But I know I haven't a temperature

MRS QUEEN Come on now, Miss You're behaving jist like Miss Baba

IRENE (*crossly*) You'd think I was six instead of sixteen (*Opens her mouth with a bad grace*)

MRS QUEEN (*placing the thermometer under IRENE's tongue*) The whole lot of you s jist six to me Don't bite it in alf now (*To MRS McNEIL*) We ll give 'er a dose of castor oil last thing, jist to be on the safe side Do er no arm if it don t do 'er no good (*As IRENE makes a grimace*) No use you screwing your face up like that, Miss You know's well as I do it don't taste, not 'ow I give it you—in between orange juice an peppermint Jist one more 'alf minnit, there s a good girl

MRS McNEIL (*to MRS QUEEN*) Draw the curtains, will you ? Put on all the lights Extravagance, I know There are some days when a little extra light s worth it

MRS QUEEN (*obeying*) Shan't 'ave to think quite so much about that sort of thing now, Ma'am We'll not need to be quite so saving now as we used

IRENE (*sharply—taking out thermometer*) Why ?

MRS QUEEN (*who realises that she has said too much*) There now, if you aven t been and took it out ! 'Tis naughty of you, Miss 'Ere, give it to me, quick (*Taking thermometer from IRENE and holding it close to the light while she reads it*) Ninety-eight point something or other ! Nothing much wrong with that

IRENE Why don't we need to be so saving now ?

MRS QUEEN It's that mix up they give you in restaurants

MRS McNEIL The food was all right Perhaps rather more of it than we're accustomed to

IRENE Queen-one, why did you say—— ?

MRS QUEEN (*shaking the thermometer briskly*)
Give me plain 'olesome 'ome cooking You ll
'ave that dose, any ow, Miss, so don t go kidding
yourself you ve escaped Now I must go and put
my kettle on Shan t be two ticks with the tea

[*Exit MRS QUEEN briskly*]

IRENE (*an appeal*) Granny, what did she mean ?

MRS McNEIL She was talking nonsense, dear
We re not in the position to be any more ex
travagant than we ve ever been (*She goes on with
her darning*)

IRENE But she must have meant something ?

MRS McNEIL You know how she talks (*Seeing
IRENE s face*) Don t ask me any more, dear Wait
till your mother comes It s her secret, not mine
She wants to tell you herself I can say this much,
I know it s something you ll like

IRENE (*vehemently*) It isn t I don't like it

MRS McNEIL (*taken aback by her tone*) You've
no idea what it is ?

IRENE Yes, I have Granny, tell me it s not
true Say it s not true

MRS McNEIL But what ? I can t say it's not
true if I don t know what you're thinking
about Can I ?

IRENE Mother s not going to marry again, is
she ? (*She wants, hoping against hope for a denial*)

MRS McNEIL (*troubled*) Don t you want her
to ?

IRENE No ! No ! No !

MRS McNEIL But why ? You liked Sir John,
didn't you ?

IRENE Not now

MRS McNEIL (*nonplussed*) I thought you'd be
so pleased

IRENE Why should I ?

MRS McNEIL You were saying only yesterday you wanted something to happen so that things could be easier for her

IRENE Not anything like this

[*Short pause*]

MRS McNEIL Hasn't it ever occurred to you that your mother might marry again ?

IRENE No

MRS McNEIL (*gently*) People do you know

IRENE Not Mother

MRS McNEIL Have you never thought she might be lonely ?

IRENE (*gazing ardently up at her father's portrait*) Lonely for Father Not just for anyone

MRS McNEIL Sir John isn't "just anyone"

IRENE He's a stranger She hadn't even seen him a month ago

MRS McNEIL Falling in love isn't a matter of time

IRENE (*her worst fear realised*) Is she in love with him ?

MRS McNEIL I hope so Yes, I believe so

IRENE But you can't be in love twice ? Not really ?

MRS McNEIL (*with a little smile at IRENE's simplicity*) My dear—you can

IRENE Then there's no such thing as being true Even when you cared as much as Mother and Father did ? You've always said what a wonderful romance theirs was During the War when she was afraid he'd be killed then afterwards in that dear little house where Baba and I were born That's how I knew how awful it was for her, losing him That's why I've loved her so much and tried to be a companion—so that she could feel she had someone who'd

belonged to him too Now it's all gone It doesn't mean anything She's forgotten Father She's fallen in love with a stranger (*She looks up again at the picture of the young airman*) How would he feel if he knew? Perhaps he does know

MRS McNEIL Because your mother's found someone else she can love it doesn't mean she's forgotten your father True love is something much bigger than—well, than a man and a woman just keeping themselves for each other

IRENE What could be bigger than that?

MRS McNEIL When you're older—when you have experience to guide you—experience of your own— My dear, it's too difficult to explain One day you'll know What you must try to think about now is how lovely it is for your mother to have found someone who can help shoulder her burdens

IRENE I was going to do that I told you yesterday—about my going as an apprentice at once so that I'd be ready to help soon then later on, our perhaps having a shop of our own

MRS McNEIL I didn't say so then—I didn't want to damp your enthusiasm—but business is no life for a woman Surely I don't need to tell you? You've seen how tired out your mother is at nights and at week ends You've seen how different she looks after a holiday With things as difficult as they are, it would be a constant struggle to make a success It could only be done at such a price—to you both Think of it On the one hand, worry and anxiety—shut in between four walls all day and every day on the other hand a husband who can give her the gracious things she was brought up to, while she's still young enough to enjoy them Doesn't that mean anything to you?

IRENE Yes, of course, but— (*The sentences coming in gasps*)—I can't help it, Granny I know

it's awful of me I can't bear the thought of it (*Getting the words out with difficulty*) I saw them last night—when I went to show my fur coat—kissing each other I feel I—I can't ever touch her again

MRS MCNEIL (*shocked*) Irene !

IRENE I know it's awful of me

MRS MCNEIL (*after a long pause*) You could put a stop to this marriage She couldn't do anything to make you really unhappy But how will you feel if she gets ill again, or loses her job—or if the shop you want only adds to her worries ? (*As IRENE is silent*) You must take care you aren't thinking only of yourself (*Another pause*) That's what we're all apt to do—to want to help people in our own way, not theirs That's self-indulgence It may do more harm than good (*With a quick warning, as the sound of the hall door closing reaches her—fainter, because the room door is now closed*) There she is

JENNIFER (*off*) You in here, Mother ? (*As she opens the door and comes in*) Sorry to have been gone so long (*Not noticing IRENE, who has quickly moved as much as possible out of sight to give herself time to recover*) John asked me to go back with him to the Law Courts He was so interesting I forgot all about the time When I looked at my watch I was astonished to find— (*Catching sight of her*) Irene ? You here already ? I thought this was the day for your dancing class ?

MRS MCNEIL (*quickly*) Sister Millicent sent her home early She suspects influenza

JENNIFER (*feelingly*) Oh, my poor lamb, I hope not (*Going to her*) Shouldn't wish this year's 'flu on my worst enemy It does such awful things to you

IRENE (*hastily*) I'm quite all right, really You know what an old fuss pot she is

JENNIFER (*eyeing her critically*) Can't say you look all right Where's the thermometer ?

MRS QUEEN (*overhearing this as she wheels in the tea wagon*) She s 'ad 'er temperature took, Madam

JENNIFER What is it ?

MRS QUEEN Jist round about what it ought to be She s going to ave a dose jist the same Did you ever see sich a face ? (*She wheels the wagon close to MRS McNEIL*)

IRENE (*vexed*) Do stop it, Queen one

MRS QUEEN (*arranging the cups and saucers*) And erritable ! Not like er real self at all There s something wants clearing

JENNIFER (*with a quick smile*) I ve no doubt it will be (*An arm round IRENE*) So sorry, darling (*Her other hand on IRENE s forehead*) Headache ?

IRENE (*unable to avoid her mother s caress—holding herself stiffly*) No, thanks

MRS McNEIL (*aware of IRENE s feeling*) Let s have our tea and see what that does for us (*She starts to pour out*) Come and help me, Irene

JENNIFER (*with pleased anticipation, as IRENE quickly releases herself and goes to her grand mother*) Tea ! I never think about it when I m out of England The moment I see those white cliffs everyone raves about I can scarcely think of anything else

MRS McNEIL It s our climate

JENNIFER To each country its own poison ! Anyhow, even the best tea from Ceylon tastes peculiar in France (*She takes off her hat and coat as she speaks*)

MRS QUEEN (*seizing her chance*) It s their insanitary water, Madam

JENNIFER But their coffee's delicious

MRS QUEEN (*taking JENNIFER's things from her*)
Coffee's a disinfectant, that's why 'Ow many
for dinner, Madam?

JENNIFER Oh—I'm glad you reminded me
Sir John may be here He'll take pot luck

MRS QUEEN No need for that I was expect-
ing im

[*Exit MRS QUEEN*]

JENNIFER (*with a smile as she goes to the fire and
holds her hands to the glow*) I should like, just
once, to catch Mrs Queen napping

MRS MCNEIL (*indicating it, to IRENE*) Your
mother's cup

[*IRENE lifts her mother's cup and saucer and takes
it to her*]

JENNIFER (*taking it from her*) Thank you, pet
MRS MCNEIL Bread and butter, or sand-
wiches?

JENNIFER (*as IRENE goes back to her grandmother*)
Not for me, thanks

MRS MCNEIL (*to IRENE*) What for you, dear?

IRENE (*taking up her own cup and saucer*) Just
tea (*She starts to drink thirstily—staying where she
is*)

MRS MCNEIL (*trying to tempt her*) Isn't this
your favourite cake?

IRENE I'm not hungry

JENNIFER Did you have a good lunch at
school?

IRENE Yes, thanks

JENNIFER (*seating herself on the couch*) Come and
sit by me

[*She pats the seat and smiles up at IRENE invit-
ingly IRENE has no choice She goes over to JENNI-
FER, who takes her hand and draws her down so that
they may sit close together*]

It is a pale face This is what comes of late nights I expect it of Baba—not you (*As IRENE tries to answer her smile*) You haven't told me yet how you like your fur coat?

IRENE (*trying to put enthusiasm into her voice*) It's simply lovely, thanks

JENNIFER Rather expected you to come dashing back last night to show us how it looked on

IRENE (*trying to seem natural*) Did you?

JENNIFER Sir John would have liked to see it As a matter of fact—I don't know if I ought to tell you—he not only helped choose it, he helped pay for it, too (*Seeing IRENE'S involuntary change of expression*) Don't look like that, darling It was his own fault He would have that particular one He knew it was more than I could afford

IRENE (*unable to keep it back*) I'd have been quite content with a cheaper one

JENNIFER You mean you'd rather it'd been all my present? Sorry, darling, I couldn't resist Anyhow, he wanted to give you something for your birthday

IRENE Why? He didn't know me

JENNIFER (*with a little smile*) I suppose because you're my daughter (*With happy assurance*) It was no use my protesting Men like to have their own way, you know

IRENE (*forcing herself to answer her mother's smile*) Do they?

JENNIFER (*with an impulsive little hug*) You are rather sweet! (*Amused by the comparison*) I don't want to cast aspersions at my younger pup, but I don't imagine she'd care *who* paid so long as she got the best going

[*Short pause IRENE keeps her constrained smile She holds herself stiffly*]

Lean back and be comfortable (*IRENE, perforce, leans back against the cushions, her mother's arm round her*) You didn't come into my room this morning?

IRENE I was late

JENNIFER First time I've ever known you go off without putting your head round the door If I'd been going to work I'd have been late too You're my clock

IRENE I thought you might be asleep

JENNIFER I was wide awake—waiting for you Mrs Queen came in with my orange juice and announced that you'd gone I was most awfully surprised—and disappointed (*Mysteriously*) I wanted to tell you a secret—before anyone else got to know

IRENE (*sitting up quickly*) Shall I show you my coat on now?

JENNIFER Wait till you're feeling more like it Don't you want to hear what——?

IRENE (*getting to her feet hurriedly*) I do feel like it (*She makes for the door*)

JENNIFER (*smiling at her eagerness*) Don't think you'll quite do it justice

IRENE (*with simulated enthusiasm*) I couldn't ever do it that (*She is going out as she speaks*)

[*Exit IRENE*]

JENNIFER (*rising slowly*) Poor kid She does look washed out (*Lifts her cup and saucer and goes over with it to the tea wagon*)

MRS McNEIL Another cup?

JENNIFER Yes, please (*Standing by while Mrs McNEIL pours out*) Seems so subdued, too Does rather look as if she was sickening for something D you think I ought to ring up Dr Sloane?

MRS McNEIL I shouldn't Let her have a night's sleep first

JENNIFER I do wonder what they'll have to say about John I'm getting rather nervous about telling them Thank goodness they liked him (*Drinking her second cup of tea where she stands*) Not that I see how they could help it But one never knows, does one? I do think it was clever of him to start off with a theatre You know, when I see Irene to day it's such a relief to know he's there—at the back of me I used to worry myself sick at the thought of any of you being ill He's got the most enchanting old house in Sussex, only about seven miles from the sea A low brick building three sides of a paved courtyard And an enormous barn where they can give dances and romp about as much as they please John says the colour of the bricks and the roofs is too lovely There are copper beeches and oaks—and away in the distance three dark tall poplars standing alone Oh, and there's a stream—almost a river And a darling little church with a steeple!—You'll think you're back home It really is rather wonderful to have found someone with all those advantages Isn't it?

MRS McNEIL You wouldn't let yourself be influenced by them, I hope?

JENNIFER Why not?

MRS McNEIL (*very seriously*) You are in love with him, aren't you? Why do you laugh?

JENNIFER Sounds so funny at my age (*Cup down*)

MRS McNEIL Does it?

JENNIFER Doesn't it?

MRS McNEIL I'd be sorry to think any age too old for love

JENNIFER (*lightly kissing the top of her head*) Sentimental old thing!

MRS McNEIL And I shouldn't care to think of you marrying for any reason except love

JENNIFER (*suddenly quite serious*) Don't worry I shouldn't Surely you know that It isn't quite the same as before I don't want it to be Young love's over-rated (*Short pause*) I just can't help bring grateful for the extras When I think of being able to give my mother and my children the things I've had to deny them——'

MRS McNEIL We've had as much as is good for us

JENNIFER I want you to have more Sheer self-indulgence on my part There's no joy equal to being able to give things to people you care about

[*Enter BABA She carries her school bag*]

BABA Hello'

JENNIFER (*swinging round*) Hello, my poppet'

BABA (*glancing round quickly*) Where's Irene?

JENNIFER Gone to try on her fur coat

BABA (*relieved*) Recovered, has she? (*Coming into the room*) Thought she'd probably've passed out by now

JENNIFER What on earth do you mean?

BABA Didn't she tell you? She fainted Went down with a flop in front of the whole class I did feel a fool

JENNIFER (*alarmed*) Fainted? Did you know that, Mother?

MRS McNEIL No

BABA Sister Millicent brought her home in a taxi That'll be on the bill

JENNIFER (*to MRS McNEIL*) Didn't Sister Millicent come up with her?

MRS McNEIL Not that I know of She came in alone

BABA Expect it was only because she was hungry She didn't have any breakfast—or lunch

JENNIFER Where's the telephone ?

MRS McNEIL You had it in your bedroom this morning

JENNIFER Go and fetch it, Baba

BABA What for ?

JENNIFER Don't argue Do as you're told

[BABA runs out

I'll get on to Dr Sloane Must be something wrong if she fainted Never known her do such a thing in her life

BABA (*running in with the telephone, which she plugs into the wall*) What number do you want ?

JENNIFER Dr Sloane's Isn't it odd of her not to have told us ?

MRS McNEIL You were just the same at her age I always had to wait till I heard things from outsiders

JENNIFER (*with a quick smile*) Was I ? One forgets

[BABA dials

BABA (*after dialling and listening*) Is that Dr Sloane's house ? You don't mean to say I've got you the first time ?

JENNIFER (*taking the receiver from her*) Give it to me (*Speaking into it*) This is Mrs Lawrence, of Wilton Square Is the doctor in ? When he comes would you ask him if he could call round here ? No—not urgent Any time this evening will do But the sooner the better Thank you Good bye

[*Just before JENNIFER replaces the receiver IRENE comes into the room She is wearing the fur coat She looks very much better and is smiling brightly At the sight of BABA she is, momentarily, taken aback*

IRENE Hello ! Didn't hear you come in (*In a quick undertone*) Q T about—you know ! (*Turning to her mother brightly*) Like it ?

JENNIFER Perhaps just a wee bit sophisticated for a fledgling ? (*Turning to Mrs McNEIL*) Eh, Mother ? But she looks nice in it All right for evening I d like to see it with the dress you were wearing last night

BABA You saw it

JENNIFER (*still looking at coat*) No, I didn't

BABA (*to IRENE*) You showed it Mother last night ? Didn't you ?

IRENE (*hastily*) No

BABA You did

JENNIFER Don't contradict, darling You've got into some very bad habits lately

BABA Why did she say she did, then ?

IRENE I didn't

BABA Oh, what lies ! You came back and said she thought it looked lovely

IRENE You must have been dreaming

BABA No, I wasn't You know that quite well I didn't even lie down till you put the light out Don't you remember ? You got undressed in the dark because you thought I d never stop talking That was after——

Mrs McNEIL (*coming to the rescue*) Irene showed it to me She must have meant that

JENNIFER Anyhow, Baba, you really mustn't keep on at things What does it matter ?

BABA (*getting her own back*) She's got rouge on—and lipstick

JENNIFER (*looking more closely at IRENE*) Have you ? I hoped it was your own colour come back That's what makes you look so—(*with a little smile*)—so elderly

[*Enter Mrs QUEEN*]

Mrs QUEEN (*announcing*) Sir John Corbett, Madam

[Enter SIR JOHN

JENNIFER (*surprised as SIR JOHN comes into the room*) This is nice I didn't expect you till dinner time

SIR JOHN (*rather apologetically*) Just happened to pass by here on my way home (*Going to her*) How are you, Mrs McNeil, after your strenuous evening?

[*They shake hands*

BABA (*before her grandmother can answer*) Didn't you say you lived in Saint James's Street?

SIR JOHN I do

BABA Have you just come from the Law Courts?

SIR JOHN I have

BABA You oughtn't to need to come anywhere near here to get from the Law Courts to Saint James's Street

JENNIFER (*apologetically*) I'm afraid Baba has a rather disconcerting knowledge of the geography of London Mrs Queen's brother drives a taxi

BABA Were you in a taxi? Just now, I mean?

SIR JOHN I was

BABA Of course he was just trying it on

SIR JOHN You think so?

BABA No doubt of it Next time Crawford comes to have supper with Mrs Queen we'll do you a diagram of the most direct route

SIR JOHN That's putting you to a great deal of trouble

BABA No trouble at all Why should you be swindled just because you look as if you'd rather pay up than argue?

JENNIFER (*taking BABA by the shoulders and urging her toward the door*) Go along now and have your tea

BABA (*coaxingly*) Can't I have it in here ?

JENNIFER No You can't You can come back afterwards But don't hurry It's your last meal to day (*At the door*) You're going to bed early

[*Before BABA can be put out, MRS QUEEN comes in carrying a large jar of lilies JENNIFER is the first to see them*

JENNIFER Oh, how glorious !

MRS QUEEN A sight for sore eyes, aren't they, Madam ?

JENNIFER They are indeed

MRS QUEEN They're a present for your mother

MRS McNEIL For me ? (*To SIR JOHN*) Did you bring them ?

[*MRS QUEEN takes them over to MRS McNEIL's table*

SIR JOHN Somebody told me you liked lilies

MRS McNEIL I do But aren't they terribly extravagant ? (*She touches them gently*)

SIR JOHN (*grinning at her boyishly*) I feel extravagant to-day

[*MRS McNEIL answers his smile*

BABA (*in a stage whisper*) They make me think of funerals !

JENNIFER (*shocked*) Baba ! (*As MRS QUEEN reaches the door*) Take her away, Mrs Queen

MRS QUEEN (*in a "nanny" voice*) Come on, now

[*Exit BABA and MRS QUEEN*

IRENE, who had been relieved at the interruption, but at the same time on edge because it was caused by the arrival of SIR JOHN, turns toward the door, hoping to slip out without being noticed

SIR JOHN (*seeing her*) Is that the fur coat ?

IRENE (*pausing—obliged to answer—striving to sound natural*) Yes Isn't it lovely?

SIR JOHN Most decorative

IRENE (*politely*) Mother says it was partly your present Thank you

SIR JOHN Not at all You weren't supposed to know that part of it

IRENE (*rather awkwardly—to her mother*) I feel rather peckish Think I'll go and have a sit-down tea too

JENNIFER (*relieved*) That sounds much better So glad Come back when you've finished (*As IRENE reaches the door*) Oh, and Irene!

[IRENE *pauses in doorway*

Don't be surprised if Dr Sloane puts in an appearance

IRENE To see me?

JENNIFER (*apologetically*) Just to be on the safe side

IRENE What's Baba been saying?

JENNIFER I want to make quite sure it's not flu

[IRENE *seems as if she is about to protest, then thinks better of it She turns and goes, closing the door quietly behind her*

SIR JOHN (*solicitously*) Not been feeling too good?

JENNIFER She fainted at school to-day (*Making light of it*) Probably only the effects of a night out

SIR JOHN I feel guilty about this How about young Baba?

JENNIFER (*with a grin*) Much too bright—as you see Shouldn't have been surprised if she'd had a tummy ache!

SIR JOHN She certainly asked for one

JENNIFER Irene's so misleading One moment you think she's reached years of discretion , the next she's an infant in arms

SIR JOHN And you, Mrs McNeil ? None the worse for your climb ?

MRS McNEIL Not a bit I think all the nice drink you gave us counteracted it I'm not supposed to take any

SIR JOHN I was reading this morning about some remarkable new discovery for rheumatism

MRS McNEIL In the *Express*, wasn't it ?

SIR JOHN I think so Yes, it would be

MRS McNEIL I won't tell you how many years it is since I tried that discovery ! I still have my rheumatism

SIR JOHN We'll have to do something about it (*Smiling down on her*) You've heard the glad news ?

MRS McNEIL Jennifer told me this morning

SIR JOHN (*linking his arm with JENNIFER's*) Are you going to give us your blessing ?

MRS McNEIL I hope you'll be very happy

SIR JOHN I shall, I know

MRS McNEIL You're very lucky people—to have found each other

JENNIFER I'm the lucky one It's more difficult for a woman There's so much competition (*Naughtily*) Besides being three to one, women to day are so much more attractive than men

SIR JOHN I can't allow that !

MRS McNEIL Don't put ideas into his head, Jennifer

JENNIFER I can't think how he's escaped for so long

SIR JOHN Nobody'd take pity on me

MRS MCNEIL When are you going to get married ?

SIR JOHN To morrow morning

JENNIFER (*turning and staring at him*) What ?

SIR JOHN (*with calm determination*) To-morrow morning, at half past seven, in the church with the steeple

JENNIFER You mean the little church you were telling me about at Knight s Abbey ?

SIR JOHN Yes I have to be in court by ten thirty We'll just about manage it

JENNIFER I can't, of course

SIR JOHN (*who is prepared to argue, but not to give in*) Why not ?

JENNIFER Well, for one thing, it's the first I've heard of it

SIR JOHN (*with a smile*) Give me a real reason

JENNIFER The best I can think of is that I'm going back to work to morrow morning at nine

SIR JOHN You're not going back to work any more

JENNIFER (*seriously*) I am, John I was going to talk to you about that Even when we do marry, I can t give up my job It s out of the question

SIR JOHN Why ?

JENNIFER We should be entirely dependent on you—(*after a slight hesitation*)—all of us

SIR JOHN Most men of my age have a family dependent on them

JENNIFER Not a ready made one

SIR JOHN That's all to the good

JENNIFER Surely you understand ? It's simply impossible for us to— (*Turning to her with an appeal for help*) Mother ? (*Sits R*)

MRS MCNEIL (*putting away her darning*) Don't ask me to interfere (*Preparing to rise*) I'll leave you

SIR JOHN (*quickly*) Don't go away, Mrs McNeil I feel you have a sense of fair play You'll be on my side (*Earnestly*) Don't let's have any false sentiment about money I can keep you fully employed looking after my interests You'll earn as much at that as you do at your dressmaking

JENNIFER It's not the same You must see my side of it

SIR JOHN I do I'm not going to allow it From an economic point of view mine's a sound proposition I'm a going concern I'm understaffed, badly managed Mrs McNeil will find she can feed us all on the fat of the land with what my servants throw in the ash bin I'd give a lot to see her audit my grocer's bill (*Catching sight of the mended stockings*) As for my socks and under vests! Do you think I ever get them darned?

JENNIFER There must be, approximately, a million women in London alone who'd be only too thankful to darn your socks and your under-vests

SIR JOHN Just goes to show how helpless I am I can't even find one

JENNIFER When you've stopped talking *nonsense*—

SIR JOHN If you can truthfully tell me you enjoy your present job so much you'd hate giving it up, that's an argument Do you? The truth, please

JENNIFER No, I don't But I'd hate to lose my independence

SIR JOHN You're not independent You're a slave A slave to your employers, a slave to your customers, a slave to conditions You're not the type for independence You're essentially a womanly woman, cut out to get your own way by guile Isn't that so, Mrs McNeil?

JENNIFER Do stop, John You're not in court now You've a tongue like an Irishman !

SIR JOHN (*with a grin*) I came by it honestly My mother was Irish Now look here I've arranged it all with my sister She's down at Knight's Abbey waiting to chaperon us to-night and sign the book in the morning We can't let her down

JENNIFER Your sister and I haven't even met yet

SIR JOHN A nice treat in store for you both

JENNIFER When did you have time to make all these arrangements ?

SIR JOHN Some by telephone from France

JENNIFER But you didn't even know then that we—that I——

SIR JOHN The rest at lunch time to-day That's why we had such a short time together

JENNIFER I thought you were looking after your client ?

SIR JOHN The licence was very expensive The strain of Lowland Scot in you couldn't possibly allow it to be wasted

JENNIFER Do you always go on like this ?

SIR JOHN Why waste time ? People waste half their lives discussing and re discussing side-issues You know Browning's 'Statue and the Bust' ?

' And next day passed and next day yet,
With still fresh cause to wait one day more "

[*Before JENNIFER can find a suitable reply the door opens and BABA, wiping her mouth, comes, full of excitement, into the room*

BABA (*from the door*) Mummie, what'd you think ? Queen one's been cutting the cards There's a hasty marriage with a dark man and——

SIR JOHN That settles it Come and tell your mother there's no point in waiting

JENNIFER (*warningly*) John ! They don't even know yet that——

SIR JOHN (*pulling himself up*) So sorry

BABA What don t I know ?

JENNIFER Run away now I'll tell you presently

MRS McNEIL Don t you think, Jennifer, as we've said so much——?

JENNIFER (*giving it up—going to bell and ringing it*) Then Irene must be told too

[MRS McNEIL *glances quickly at the bell, seems about to protest, decides not to and, instead, takes out her embroidery*

BABA (*with keen anticipation*) What s all the excitement ?

JENNIFER (*as there's no help for it*) What would you say if you heard I was going to get married again ?

BABA Depends who it was to

SIR JOHN Here's a dark man for you

BABA (*turning to him delightedly*) Oh, if it was you ! Is it ?

SIR JOHN I hope so

BABA Good enough ! When ?

SIR JOHN That's just what we're arguing about I like to get on with things

BABA (*who has at last found someone of her own way of thinking*) So do I Do get done soon, Mummie Then we can start having fun Queen-one saw the most heavenly——

[*Enter MRS QUEEN*

MRS QUEEN You rang, Madam ?

JENNIFER Yes, Mrs Queen Ask Irene to come here, will you ?

MRS QUEEN Yes, Madam

[Exit MRS QUEEN

JENNIFER (*as MRS QUEEN closes the door*) Baba, you know I don't like you to encourage Mrs Queen to tell fortunes

SIR JOHN (*with a twinkle*) When the poor child has a mother at home to look after her——

BABA (*delighted*) Will she be at home ?

SIR JOHN If I have my way

BABA All the time ? Not just a fortnight in summer and Bank Holidays ?

SIR JOHN (*making the most of this*) If she does what we ask her We'll be able to play golf together and tennis, and ride and swim D you know how to sail a boat ?

JENNIFER Bribery and corruption !

SIR JOHN All's fair—— !

BABA Ride ? On horse back ?

[Enter IRENE

IRENE (*at the door*) You wanted me, Mother ?

[MRS McNEIL *glances at her compassionately, then goes on with her embroidery*

JENNIFER (*going to IRENE and drawing her into the room*) Yes, dear I've something to tell you I had meant to do it this morning—or later when we were alone But as things——

BABA (*unable to restrain herself*) You know what Queen one saw just now in the cards ? Well, it's true Mummie's going to be able to give up her beastly work we're going to ride and play golf and tennis—— They're getting married He's the dark man

JENNIFER (*ruefully*) I'm not even allowed to tell it myself

BABA Isn't it heavenly ?

IRENE (*with a bright smile*) Heavenly

JENNIFER (*an arm round IRENE—eagerly*) Pleased, darling ?

IRENE If you're happy ?

JENNIFER I am—if—if——(*She looks more closely at IRENE for reassurance*)

[IRENE's smile satisfies her Still keeping an arm round IRENE she turns to SIR JOHN—her eyes shining]

I'm afraid you're right I must be a womanly woman I don't know about the guile—but it simply thrills me to think of a domestic life with my family (*Her glance includes him She holds out her free hand*) I give in Gladly

SIR JOHN (*going to her—eagerly*) Then—— ?

JENNIFER To-morrow morning—in the little church with the steeple

IRENE (*betrayed into an exclamation*) To-morrow morning ?

JENNIFER Rushing things a bit, isn't it ? No wonder you look surprised I was too But now you know and—(*with a quick smile*)—approve, I agree there's no point in waiting I suppose in my heart of hearts I was just a wee bit doubtful if—— (*With mock secrecy, but serious intent*) Don't tell John, but I don't think I could have done it at all if you two hadn't liked him (*Glancing at him apologetically*) You see, John, I couldn't let anything——

MRS QUEEN (*announcing*) Dr Sloane Madam

[Enter DR SLOANE *He is a man of sixty three, but appears younger He looks what he is, a physician in the true sense of the word—a man who combines the virtues of an open mind with experience As he comes in, the others turn to him MRS LAWRENCE goes forward with a smile of welcome*]

Exit MRS QUEEN

JENNIFER (*cordially*) Good afternoon, Doctor

It is good of you to come so soon I'm rather afraid we've got you out on false pretences

DR SLOANE (*with quick scrutiny*) Easy to see you're not the patient !

JENNIFER Not this time

DR SLOANE I was rather afraid when I heard you were home before your time was up——

JENNIFER (*as she draws him into the room*) The sooner you two know each other—— (*Glancing at JOHN*) This is our best friend, Dr Sloane—Sir John Corbett

DR SLOANE Very nicely put, me dear (*Holding out a hand as he peers rather short sightedly at SIR JOHN*) I've good reason to remember you, Sir

SIR JOHN (*as they shake hands*) That sounds ominous

DR SLOANE I was witness on the other side in one of your more spectacular cases

SIR JOHN I hope I treated you fairly ?

DR SLOANE You did not You treated me abominably You got your client acquitted

MRS McNEIL You can get your own back on him now

DR SLOANE (*going to her and shaking hands*) How are you to-day ? Persevering with those exercises ?

MRS McNEIL (*with a noncommittal smile*) Yes—and no

DR SLOANE And how do you propose I get my own back ?

MRS McNEIL You're the family physician He's going to become one of it

DR SLOANE Oh ?

BABA They're getting married Isn't it fun ?

DR SLOANE (*a paternal smile breaking over his face*)
Congratulations, Sir (*Turning to JENNIFER*) And
you, me dear This is the best news I ve heard
for a long while When s it to be ?

BABA To morrow——

DR SLOANE To morrow ? That s quick work,
isn't it ?

JENNIFER It is John insists

DR SLOANE (*with approval*) And very properly
you begin as you mean to go on—by obeying
orders, eh ?

IRENE (*finding this too difficult to bear silently—the
tone of her voice even more than her words coming as a
sharp interruption*) Mother doesn t take orders—
not from anyone (*Shocked by her own words and
the sound of her own voice, she stares angrily from one
to the other, then turns and goes blindly from the room,
banging the door behind her*)

JENNIFER (*astonished*) What on earth—— ?

MRS McNEIL (*hurriedly*) She doesn t know
what she s saying (*Rising as quickly as she can*)
I ll go to her

JENNIFER Let me

MRS McNEIL (*who has risen*) No—no If you
go it ll make too much of it

[*She takes her stick and limps to the door, her
expression showing her anxiety* SIR JOHN gets there
first and holds the door open for her

JENNIFER (*as MRS McNEIL goes to the door—to
DR SLOANE*) It was because of Irene I sent
for you She fainted at school to day I thought
she seemed better, but——

DR SLOANE (*comfortably matter of fact*) Lots of
girls of her age faint—regularly Especially in
cold weather Has she a temperature ?

JENNIFER Mrs Queen says not

DR SLOANE I give way to Mrs Queen when it comes to cooking, but—— I think I ll go and see for myself

[*Exit DR SLOANE BABA, who has been silenced by IRENE s outburst, follows him out without anyone remarking*]

JENNIFER (*worried*) It does really look as if she s sickening for something

SIR JOHN (*gently*) Don t worry, dear She s in good hands

JENNIFER (*with a troubled smile*) Now you see what you re letting yourself in for—taking on a family

SIR JOHN (*taking her by the shoulders and looking down at her tenderly*) There s one thing, with all your troubles, you haven t experienced

JENNIFER What s that ?

SIR JOHN Not having a family That s been my trouble for years I want roots and responsibilities—the sort you re going to give me I m prepared to swallow the powder with the jam

JENNIFER (*gratefully*) You make everything seem so—so equal

SIR JOHN It is We both need, not only each other, but all the other has to offer

JENNIFER (*after a moment or two*) I wonder what made her flare up like that ?

SIR JOHN (*bantering*) Obviously I ll have to be careful how I give orders

JENNIFER (*trying to find an explanation*) She s always resented my having had to toe the line at my job Perhaps that s it ?

SIR JOHN That and—liver

JENNIFER Chiefly liver, I daresay (*With a little hug*) I do thank God for you (*As SIR JOHN shows his pleasure*) You re so sane and philosophic I believe with you to help I m going to be able to let myself be happy

SIR JOHN Let yourself?

JENNIFER I'm so afraid of sorrow I look the other way I pretend not to see—in case I'll be drawn in and have to do something I make the excuse to myself that I've enough on my shoulders already

SIR JOHN So you have—or had

JENNIFER Not really If I m honest I know it's either laziness or fear

SIR JOHN (*knowing instinctively what line to take*) Nonsense—a thoughtless happy person does far more good than a thoughtful gloomy one

JENNIFER Couldn't one be both—thoughtful and happy?

SIR JOHN Shall we try?

[*As JENNIFER, her eyes misty with gratitude, silently assents, the door opens and MRS QUEEN enters*

MRS QUEEN (*drawing back as she sees them*) Oh, Madam, excuse me

JENNIFER That's all right, Mrs Queen Don't go away Have you heard what Dr Sloane has to say about Irene?

MRS QUEEN No, Madam 'E's still in with 'er I'd an idea you was there too

JENNIFER Did you know we're going to be married to-morrow morning?

MRS QUEEN To morrow? Oh, Madam! (*Astonished pause*) But p raps it's as well There's many a girl lost their chance through giving a man time If I may say so, Sir, you'll 'ave no cause to regret it

SIR JOHN (*trying to keep a straight face*) I hope Madam won't either

MRS QUEEN It'll be the making of 'er, Sir Many's the time and oft 'ave I looked at 'er lying in 'er lone bed and thought what a pity

SIR JOHN (*controlling himself with difficulty*) I can count on you to go on taking care of her ?

MRS QUEEN You can, Sir When I leave this fam'ly, it'll be with me feet foremost (*She goes to tea wagon*)

SIR JOHN Now I must go and fetch the ring

JENNIFER The ring ? I'd forgotten we needed one You don't know the size

SIR JOHN Don't I ? (*Lifting her third finger*) You remember my admiring this ?

JENNIFER Vaguely—yes

SIR JOHN I asked to see the setting It went on as far as the first knuckle of my little finger

JENNIFER But that was—— We'd only known one another a few days

SIR JOHN Now are you convinced there was no escape for you ?

MRS QUEEN (*who is busying herself*) That's the way to do it, Sir You keep on like that

SIR JOHN How soon can she be ready ?

MRS QUEEN As soon as you want her, Sir

JENNIFER But, John, I must wait to hear what Dr Sloane has to say If Irene's really ill I shouldn't want to leave town

SIR JOHN Then we must go to a registry office Whatever happens we're going to be married to-morrow morning It's pure sentiment my wanting the little church

JENNIFER I feel sentimental, too

MRS QUEEN (*who approves of this*) Don't you worry, Madam We'll look after 'er just the same as if you was here

SIR JOHN (*glancing at his watch*) Anyhow, I must go and get that ring Come to the door with me

JENNIFER (*as they go slowly toward the door*) Would it do if we leave after dinner ?

SIR JOHN Any time—so long as we don't keep parson waiting I can 'phone my sister So long, Mrs Queen

[Enter BABA *She meets them in the doorway*

BABA You going ?

SIR JOHN Yes But you haven't got rid of me

BABA (*turning to go out with them*) We don't want to I'll see him out, Mummie

MRS QUEEN You come here, Miss Baba

[Exit JENNIFER and SIR JOHN

BABA (*pausing*) What for ?

MRS QUEEN I got something to show you

BABA (*coming back into the room*) What ?

MRS QUEEN (*going to it and closing door discreetly*) Don't you know better than to go angling about whilst they're taking their leave of one another ?

BABA Why ?

MRS QUEEN (*sorting cushions*) They've things to talk about

BABA (*presently*) What d'you think's the matter with Irene ? Anything infectious ?

MRS QUEEN (*tidying hearth*) Shouldn't wonder You always 'ave had something infectious when it wasn't convenient

BABA (*opening the neck of her blouse and trying to see her chest*) D'you think that's a spot ?

MRS QUEEN (*piling on coal*) If it is I haven't the time to bother with it just now

[The door opens Enter MRS McNEIL, followed by DR SLOANE MRS McNEIL, as she goes to her chair, glances at MRS QUEEN, but refrains from protest

DR SLOANE (*speaking as they come in*) Just keep her in the house for a day or two No need for her to stay in bed if she doesn't want to

BABA (*eagerly*) Shall we have to go into quarantine ?

DR SLOANE Not a hope

BABA I m sure I ve got a spot

DR SLOANE (*with a twinkle*) Where s my knife and I'll cut it out Looks as if a dose of our good old friend brimstone and treacle is indicated Eh, Mrs Queen ?

MRS QUEEN (*wheeling out tea wagon*) I'll pop down to the chemist at once, Sir

BABA You are horrid

MRS QUEEN (*at the door*) Anything you want me to do for Miss Irene, Doctor ?

DR SLOANE Keep her warm Don t force her to eat until she s hungry

MRS QUEEN She s jist ad a good tea

BABA No, she hasn t She didn t eat anything

MRS QUEEN (*staring at her*) What 'appened to all them scrambled eggs ? (*As BABA solemnly rubs her stomach*) Where you put it, Miss, beats me (*To DR SLOANE*) It s my opinion she as worms, Sir

[*Exit MRS QUEEN with tea wagon*]

MRS MCNEIL (*who has reached her chair, seated herself, and taken up her embroidery*) Run along, Baba

BABA (*rather pathetically*) Where to ? Mrs Queen doesn t want me in the kitchen Irene won t talk Mother s with him

MRS MCNEIL If you mean Sir John, he was just going as we came in Your mother will want you to help pack her suit case

BABA (*eagerly*) Will she ? (*Going quickly to door*) Don't suppose she'll want anything but a tooth brush

[*Exit BABA*]

MRS McNEIL (*calling after her*) Close the door

[BABA, *from outside, closes the door hastily*

DR SLOANE (*after door is closed*) She should be romping about in the country

MRS McNEIL She'll be able to soon Sir John has a house in Sussex

DR SLOANE Splendid This marriage looks like being a good thing for you all

MRS McNEIL (*going on with her work*) Except Irene

DR SLOANE (*immediately alert*) So that's it, is it ? How do you know ?

MRS McNEIL Something Mrs Queen said this afternoon brought it all out Unfortunately she discovered it by accident She came back to this room last night after the theatre He was still here She saw them—kissing each other Seems to have been rather a shock to her

DR SLOANE Would be—with that mother fixation

MRS McNEIL Now you're beyond me We didn't have such things in my day

DR SLOANE (*pouncing on this*) Your day ? What d'you mean ? Your days now

MRS McNEIL (*who feels it at the moment*) I'm an old woman

DR SLOANE Only when it suits you Let me remind you—you and I were born in the same year

MRS McNEIL Sorry

DR SLOANE I admit that when we were considerably younger all this Freud stuff was lumped together under the one heading—jealousy

MRS McNEIL Irene isn't a jealous girl

DR SLOANE Not in the usual sense of the word But she has the protective instinct very highly

developed She's too much attached to her mother

MRS McNEIL That's the dreadful part of it I'm afraid this has caused a revulsion of feeling At the moment she can't bear to be near her For one thing, she seems to look on it as disloyalty to her father

DR SLOANE (*impatiently*) The inevitable result of this absurd hero worship

MRS McNEIL (*with a quick, surprised glance*) Absurd? Surely you wouldn't have had them not think well of their own father?

DR SLOANE I wouldn't have had them build a halo round a very ordinary young man just because he wore uniform The ideal set up won't bear contact with life Actual fact becomes too crude It's a thousand pities Jennifer didn't marry again ten years ago Irene's at the worst possible age 'Neither child nor woman Too much undigested knowledge in words, none in experience If she were that much younger a kiss would just be a kiss Now it provokes the imagination In cold blood the act of mating is bound to seem unpleasant to an over sensitive adolescent

MRS McNEIL (*very much troubled*) What can we do about it?

DR SLOANE Nothing—except keep it from her mother till after the wedding to-morrow I take it she doesn't know already, does she?

MRS McNEIL No one knows, except you and me

DR SLOANE Corbett's a good fellow There aren't so many going begging Even if he'd been a lot less desirable I'd have said "Let her get on with it" Anything rather than celibacy for a normal healthy young woman Oh, I know you don't like it put into words If you'd seen the consequences in middle age as often as I have—

IRENE (*bending over the knot*) Sorry

MRS McNEIL Hadn't you better pack what you do want, Jennifer ?

JENNIFER (*happily*) I suppose so

BABA I'll help you What are you taking ?

JENNIFER (*as they go*) What do you advise ?

BABA Of course I don't think a wedding's a wedding if the bride doesn't wear a white dress

JENNIFER That makes it rather difficult, doesn't it ? Let's see what we can do Coming, Irene ?

IRENE (*busying herself elaborately with the knot*)
When I've finished this

MRS McNEIL Better not Doctor said she was to keep warm

JENNIFER Oh, yes, of course We shan't be long

[*Exit JENNIFER and BABA*]

Their voices can be heard laughing and chanting
Something old and something new, something borrowed, something blue ' *There is silence for a moment* MRS McNEIL gazes compassionately at IRENE's bowed head IRENE lets the skein of silk fall from her hands *With tragic eyes and trembling lips she looks at her grandmother* MRS McNEIL holds out her arms IRENE sinks down beside her MRS McNEIL holds her close

MRS McNEIL (*gently*) She's going to be very, very happy, my dear

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE I

Same night IRENE and BABA's bedroom *This is a young girl's room, simply and inexpensively furnished, but colourful* IRENE and BABA have shared it for a number of years, during which they have grown out of possessions not yet discarded *There are two narrow beds, two painted wardrobes, a dressing table and a small wash stand* Between the beds is a commode, holding a shaded light, which can be turned off either at the door or by its own switch

When the curtain rises MRS QUEEN is folding back the bed covers She then takes two nightdresses out of their cases and lays them ready These are made of stockinette or viyella, daintily finished, one with blue binding, the other with pink After this she goes to the wardrobes and brings out a blue and a pink flannel dressing gown and warm bedroom slippers to match These are not new, but have been well cared for Just as she is finishing these preparations the door opens and IRENE comes in She closes the door quickly, leaning against it, as if letting herself go after too big an effort to control herself Only the bed light is on MRS QUEEN is hidden by a wardrobe door IRENE believes herself to be alone

MRS QUEEN (*emerging and seeing her before IRENE is aware of it*) Feeling bad again, Miss ?

IRENE (*quickly pulling herself together*) Oh ! You there ?

MRS QUEEN (*going to her, switching on the other lights as she speaks*) Come over faint again ?

IRENE No Just tired

MRS QUEEN Better get into bed

IRENE (*going over to her own bed*) I think I will

MRS QUEEN I'll 'elp you undress

IRENE (*undoing her blouse*) Please don't bother I can manage

MRS QUEEN (*assisting her, nevertheless—taking blouse from her*) We 'ave 'ad a day of surprises, 'aven't we?

IRENE (*undoing her skirt*) Yes, rather

MRS QUEEN (*hanging blouse over a chair back*) You could of knocked me edgeways when they announced they was going to the church before their breakfasts to-morrow (*Taking IRENE'S skirt from her*) Sit down while I take off your shoes

IRENE (*sitting*) I'll do them

MRS QUEEN Come on, now (*Taking IRENE'S feet in turn and removing shoes and stockings*) Different from me and my usband We'd bin walking out two years to the day when 'e stops and says—dignified, im being the butler—'Well, Miss Crawford, from to-night on it's Annie' (*She hangs stockings over chair, places shoes neatly under it and takes IRENE'S nightdress from the bed*) Slip this on quick so's not to catch cold

[IRENE, with her assistance, does so, then takes off the rest of her things underneath MRS QUEEN takes them from her]

Who'd 'ave thought it this time a month ago and 'er looking like death! Don't mind telling you, now it's all over, I thought she was gone. Thing I'm best pleased about is 'er not aving to go back to that shop. All them lights and 'ot air. All right for the customer as only 'as to prance in and out again. Not for them as 'as it all day. As for the women! Ev'ry bit of evil that's in 'em seems to come uppermost when they're buying their clothes (*Having laid aside the last of IRENE'S garments—holding back the bedclothes*) You 'op in now. Never mind about your teeth nor your prayers nor anything—just for to-night (*As IRENE gets into bed*) Like a 'ot water bottle?

No, thanks

MRS QUEEN Nestle down

[As IRENE is about to lie down the door is opened hurriedly and BABA enters talking as she does so]

BABA (*impatiently*) Where are you, Irene?
(*Seeing her*) Hello! You in bed?

MRS QUEEN She come over faint again

IRENE (*hastily*) No, I didn't. Just tired. Don't say anything.

BABA They're off in a minute.

IRENE Say good-bye for me. Tell Mother not to bother to come in. Say I'm nearly asleep.

BABA (*eager to get back to the excitement*) Right you are.

[Exit BABA hurriedly as she speaks]

MRS QUEEN I must just go and see if your Ma's got everything.

IRENE Put out the lights, will you?

MRS QUEEN (*tucking her in*) Pleasant dreams—in case you drop off.

IRENE (*softly*) Dear Queen, one.

MRS QUEEN What's that?

IRENE (*with a wan little smile*) Just—dear Queen.

MRS QUEEN (*touched*) Mind, no getting up for school in the morning. Comfy?

IRENE Yes, thanks.

MRS QUEEN (*kissing her on the forehead*) Just think of all the nice things we've got to look forward to. Night, night!

IRENE (*a murmur—as MRS QUEEN goes to door*) Good night.

MRS QUEEN (*switching off lights, except bed light*) I'll leave that light on for Miss Baba.

[As she says this the door opens and JENNIFER, wearing outdoor clothes, suited to the country and at the same time becoming, comes in]

JENNIFER (*anxiously*) Baba tells me you're in bed ? (*Seeing MRS QUEEN—lowering her voice*) Is she feeling ill again ?

[*At the sound of her mother's voice, IRENE gives a start, then closes her eyes*

MRS QUEEN (*reassuringly*) Not reely, Madam Jist tired

JENNIFER (*going over to the bed and gazing down at IRENE—gently*) Darling ?

IRENE (*almost inaudibly*) Yes ?

[*MRS QUEEN hesitates, then goes from the room*

JENNIFER Would you rather I didn't go ? We could put it off till you're better Then you could be at the wedding

IRENE (*quickly*) No—no I'm quite all right—really I'd much rather you go

JENNIFER Really and truly ?

IRENE Yes Really and truly

JENNIFER I daresay I'll be back before you're awake We'll have a lovely long morning together We haven't had the chance of a real talk since I came home (*Remembering*) By the way, what was it you wanted to speak about ? Will it keep ? Last night, after the theatre, you said there was something you wanted to talk about when we were alone ?

IRENE (*lying*) I don't remember

JENNIFER Then it can't have been anything very important Can it ? (*Bending over her*) *Au revoir*, my sweet If I'm going I must go !

IRENE (*sharply*) Don't kiss me (*With a quick apologetic laugh*) In case I am sickening for something

JENNIFER (*drawing her close in a maternal embrace*) As if I care ! I'm going to be a real mother at last It's almost too good to be true Not only

John, but my family We'll have such a lovely, lovely life together (*Kissing IRENE tenderly*) God bless !

IRENE (*giving the usual response*) God bless—— !

[JENNIFER *pauses beside the bed with closed eyes, as if saying a little prayer of gratitude, then turns and goes to the door When she opens it the light shows from the passage*

JENNIFER (*as she goes out—raising her voice a little, but still keeping it gentle*) Here I am, John So sorry to keep you waiting (*She closes the door as she goes out*)

[*Exit* JENNIFER

After the door is closed IRENE waits for an instant, then sits up and, with fierce distaste, rubs her mother's kiss from her mouth From the hall comes the sound of laughter and voices, BABA's predominating

BABA (*presently—off*) Wait for me, Queen one I'm coming down too

[*More distant voices and laughter, then silence IRENE is staring at her closed door as if she could see through it and hated what she saw Before she can lie down again it opens and MRS McNEIL comes in noiselessly*

MRS McNEIL (*as she sees IRENE*) Well, dear ?

IRENE (*quickly forcing herself to smile*) Hello, Granny

MRS McNEIL (*limping, with the aid of her stick, to the bed*) I was so proud of you When I saw you this evening, laughing and chatting, I said to myself, " She's made of the right stuff She can put someone else's happiness before her own feelings " (*Short pause They smile at each other*) Sooner or later we all have to learn to do that And the funny thing is, it so often means our own happiness as well in the end One day you'll look back and laugh at all you've been through to day

IRENE I expect I shall

MRS McNEIL (*much relieved*) I believe you feel better about it already? The first shock's the worst Shall I tell you something? When I heard I'd lost my job my heart went right down into my boots

IRENE Your job?

MRS McNEIL It may not have seemed like one to you But I knew it was a relief to your mother to know I was here when you got home from school In that way I was of real use to her To put it bluntly, I was earning my keep

IRENE (*shocked*) Granny!

MRS McNEIL Sounds dreadful, doesn't it, put into words But we all like to think we're doing something to justify our existence

IRENE That's what I wanted

MRS McNEIL You're young You have your own life in front of you Mine's past I have to live in other people's lives, or not live at all (*Deliberately cheerful again*) But I had a little talk with myself I told myself there's still lots I can do—in the background—quietly I'll be there when you need me

[*There is the sound of the front door banging This is followed by BABA's breathless giggle Presently the bedroom door is opened with exaggerated caution and BABA tiptoes in When she sees IRENE sitting up she relaxes with relief*

BABA (*over her shoulder*) No need for all the agony She's wide awake (*Coming into the room—excitedly to IRENE*) We tied one of your old shoes to the car Just as they moved off I threw rice in at the window!

MRS QUEEN (*following her, switching on the other lights as she does so She is beaming with enjoyment*) You shouldn't rely on, Miss Baba They're not man and wife yet, you know

BABA (*complacently*) As good as (*Throwing herself on her grandmother*) Isn't it fun?

MRS MCNEIL (*thinking of her knees*) Careful—careful!

BABA (*who knows what she means*) You're to go and have a rheumatically cure for your knees. We'll have you skipping about like a young gazelle (*She does a little skip to illustrate*).

MRS MCNEIL That will be nice.

BABA We're all going to Knight's Abbey at Easter. Queen one too. He's got a pony just the right size for me. And lots of old golf clubs for me to smash up till I learn how. When I'm good at it I'm to have a set of my own.

MRS MCNEIL You mustn't always think of what you're to get, Baba.

BABA I'm only telling you what he said.

MRS MCNEIL Now get to bed. You've had excitement enough for one day. School in the morning.

BABA Can't I stop away too? Irene is.

MRS MCNEIL No. You can't.

MRS QUEEN (*who is waiting by her bed*) Come on now, Miss Baba.

MRS MCNEIL Let her undress herself. Mrs. Queen.

MRS QUEEN (*taking hold of BABA and starting to peel off her clothes*) If I do she'll still be at it this time to-morrow.

MRS MCNEIL (*turning to IRENE, who has lain down, turning her face away from the others*) Good night, dear.

IRENE (*pressing her grandmother's hand to her cheek*) Good night.

MRS MCNEIL Wake up quite well in the morning (*She pauses, then turns and limps to the door*).

BABA By then you'll be a mother-in-law

MRS McNEIL Dear, dear ! I shall have to mind my P's and Q's We all know what they say about mothers in law !

[Exit MRS McNEIL, to the sound of BABA's giggle and MRS QUEEN's laughter]

During the following little scene MRS QUEEN is undressing BABA, and arranging her clothes ready for the morning

BABA (to MRS QUEEN) He gave you a present, didn't he ?

MRS QUEEN 'E did, Miss I told you 'e was a real gentleman

BABA How are you going to spend it ?

MRS QUEEN First I'll go and have a look at the grave then I'll treat meself to the cinema No one else seems to want to

BABA (*thoroughly approving of the latter*) What shall you see ?

MRS QUEEN Something sad Shouldn't mind last week's all over again

BABA The one about the couple that met each other too late ?

MRS QUEEN Never shall I forget 'er face as she looks up at 'im And 'im 'olding er that beautiful Thinks I, She'll undo erself with that " But no, she ad strength give er And when they 'as that glass of wine—sherry, I'd say it was—and them too full up with their sorrow to drink it ! Then when 'e dies and she throws erself into the river ! Talk about crying The tears fair coursed down my cheeks That was a picture !

BABA (*enviously*) Wish I could see it (*Cheering up as she remembers how thrilling life is at the moment*) As soon as they've got time to look round we're going to have either a small house or a maisonette on two floors so they can have

one to themselves You're to have extra help—
a housemaid and a parlourmaid, or else a man
Which would you rather ?

MRS QUEEN Need you ask ?

BABA That's what I thought

MRS QUEEN (*going to washstand and pouring water
into a glass, then finding BABA's toothbrush*) Now
your teeth

BABA Need I ?

MRS QUEEN Yes, you need What would your
Ma say ?——

[BABA, as always when it's inevitable, obeys cheer-
fully She takes toothbrush and glass and cleans her
teeth heartily, if perfunctorily, as MRS QUEEN goes
over to IRENE

—Sure you won t 'ave a 'ot bottle ?

IRENE No, thanks

MRS QUEEN Nothing to eat nor drink ?

IRENE No, thanks

BABA Did I have my supper ?

MRS QUEEN You did You're 'aving no more
now your teeth s done (*Going to BABA's bed and
holding clothes back*) Come on In with you I
want to go and see to your grandma

BABA (*climbing into bed*) The day after to-
morrow s the party Really things are looking
up a bit

MRS QUEEN Nestle down, now

[BABA lies down MRS QUEEN tucks in the bed-
clothes, then kisses her affectionately

Pleasant dreams, love

BABA Same to you (*As MRS QUEEN turns
away*) Don t turn out this light at the door I'll
do it here

MRS QUEEN See you do, then No hanky-panky

BABA (*as MRS QUEEN turns off other lights*) I'll do it now (*Switches off bed light*)

[MRS QUEEN opens the door The light from the passage comes in

Be a good girl Don't fall off the bus !

MRS QUEEN (*responding to an old joke*) Not tonight, Miss 'Aven't got on me right garters

[Exit MRS QUEEN

BABA *waits till the door is closed, then sits up and switches on the bed light She waits for a moment or two in case MRS QUEEN should return, then gets out of bed goes to the wardrobe, and, from behind the things that hang there, unearths a book and the large box of chocolates she had brought from the theatre last night She goes back to bed, arranges her pillows so that they shall be comfortable while she reads, gets in opens the chocolate box and the book and starts reading She eats as she does so*

BABA (*presently*) You awake, Irene ?

IRENE (*her voice muffled*) Yes

BABA What'd you think the girls at school'll have to say when they hear we've got a new father ?

IRENE (*half sitting up*) We haven't He's not our father

BABA Not yet, but he will be

IRENE (*now completely up*) No, he won't

BABA You know what I mean

IRENE You're not to say he's our father

BABA Stepfather, then Needn't get so excited about it

[Pause BABA munches ruminatively, then speaks again

What will they do in the meantime ? Will she

go to his flat or will he come to ours ? Have to sleep in her room if he does Molly Purdell's mother and father share the same bedroom They used to have a big double bed Now they've sold that and got two single ones It's healthier (*Short pause*) Vera Rankin's mother likes a locked door in between (*Short pause*) I wonder what people *really* do when they're married ? (*Short pause*) D you think she'll have a baby ?

IRENE (*dangerously*) What did you say ?

BABA Do you think she'll have a baby ?

IRENE Don't you dare say that again

BABA (*annoyed*) Why ever not ? (*As IRENE gets out of bed and stands menacingly over her*) Why did you ask if you didn't want me to ? What's wrong with her having a baby ? (*As IRENE grips her fiercely by the shoulders*) Leave me alone (*As IRENE, her pent up emotion let loose, begins to shake her ferociously*) Leave me alone, can't you ? Stop it ! Look what you've done ! (*Beginning to cry from fear and anger*) You've spilt all my chocolates I only said—

IRENE (*putting a hand over BABA's mouth and pressing her head back against the pillows*) Don't ! Don't ! I'll kill you if you say that again (*As BABA struggles to free herself*) Little beast—little beast—little beast—— ! I'll kill you !

BABA (*making a superhuman effort, clutching at IRENE's wrist, getting her mouth free and screaming*) Granny—Granny—Queen-one—— ! (*Freeing herself she springs out of bed, dashes to the door and struggles with the handle*)

[IRENE starts to follow her She sees BABA's terrified face and stops short abruptly Suddenly seeming to come to herself, she gives a scared glance round the room, then turns back to her bed and sinks down with utter abandonment Sobs rack her They become wilder As the curtain falls they are entirely beyond

her control BABA's voice can be heard as she darts out and down the passage

Queen one, come quick ! Irene's gone mad
She's trying to kill me ! Granny—be quick—— !

CURTAIN

SCENE II

The sitting room again Next morning

MRS MCNEIL, *looking tired and worried, holds the telephone receiver to her ear While waiting she glances toward the half open door, as if listening*

MRS MCNEIL (*presently*) That you, Doctor ?
I just rang up to know if you could come round
some time this morning ? Yes—Irene No No
special hurry She's asleep at the moment
Thank you Good bye

[MRS MCNEIL *replaces the receiver, stands still for a moment, then picks up a duster she has been using and finishes dusting her table She then limps over to the window, opens it, shakes the duster and, as if her glance is arrested, pauses to look out and down*

Enter MRS QUEEN She is wearing outdoor clothes—neat hat, long dark coat and woollen gloves

MRS QUEEN (*glancing anxiously at MRS MCNEIL*) Was you looking for me, Ma'am ?

MRS MCNEIL (*a little bit startled at the unexpected sound of a voice*) You back already ?

MRS QUEEN I run as fast as I could, Ma'am

MRS MCNEIL I thought I saw the car

MRS QUEEN (*taking off her gloves and chafing her fingers*) Bit soon, isn't it ? 'Ow is she ?

MRS MCNEIL (*closing the window*) Still asleep
I listened at the door a few moments ago
(*Limping over to her chair*) There wasn't a sound

MRS QUEEN (*going over and placing Mrs McNEIL's footstool*) Did you get on to Doctor ?

MRS McNEIL Just now (*She sits*)

MRS QUEEN When are we to expect 'im ?

MRS McNEIL (*taking up her mending bag*)
Some time this morning I said there was no hurry

MRS QUEEN I ll need to get er washed and the beds made

MRS McNEIL Leave her till she wakes As Doctor Sloane said himself—sleep will do her more good than he can

MRS QUEEN (*going over to the fireplace*) Give that man is due, e s honest More n you can say of most doctors Pack of sharks I see you bin round with the duster You shouldn t of

MRS McNEIL I thought perhaps they might come before you got back Was Baba late for school ?

MRS QUEEN (*starting to replenish the fire*) Not so very Didn't miss anything—only prayers

MRS McNEIL (*unable to desist*) Not too much coal please, Mrs Queen

MRS QUEEN (*taking up the hearthbrush*) This grate 'as 'ad a lick and a promise ' (*Brushing hearth vigorously*) I got old of one of the Sisters and explained Not the truth, of course, Ma am Jist we'd bin all at sixes and sevens with our lady getting married so sudden You d 'ave thought she was human, the excited way she went on Before I knew it we was that matey I found meself repeating the remark Miss Baba set us off with after 'er first go at the scriptures

MRS McNEIL (*who is mechanically sorting the contents of her mending-bag*) What was that ?

MRS QUEEN Don't say you've forgot ' You was convulsed at the time 'Er jist so igh and

gazing up at me that serious "Queen-one," she says, 'may the nuns that s not married to God look at any other gentlemen?'

MRS MCNEIL (*amused in spite of her anxiety*)
Now you mention it—— Was Sister shocked?

MRS QUEEN Laughed fit to kill 'erself Going to pass it on to 'er Mother Superior

MRS MCNEIL Did you tell her we were keeping Irene in bed for a day or two?

MRS QUEEN (*finishing with the grate*) I did She was all for it, seeing 'ow poorly she looked yisterday If she d of seen er last night ' Take Miss Baba all 'er time to get over it Never knew 'er so willing (*Going to door*) Now I must get into me 'arness and do a bit of work for a change Would you like me jst to open the door and peep in again?

MRS MCNEIL Don t waken her

MRS QUEEN I won't, Ma'am

[Exit MRS QUEEN

MRS MCNEIL *waits for the door to close, then rises laboriously and goes, with the aid of her stick, to the fireplace She picks up the tongs and removes several pieces of coal, putting them back into the scuttle She then returns to her chair, seats herself and takes up a stocking Before starting to mend it she glances at the clock, then at her own watch As she does this the door is opened hurriedly MRS QUEEN, now wearing her usual large white apron, stands in the doorway, an expression of surprise and fear on her face Enter MRS QUEEN*

MRS MCNEIL (*who has glanced toward the door at the sound of it opening—alarmed by MRS QUEEN'S expression—sharply*) What is it?

MRS QUEEN She's not there, Ma'am

MRS MCNEIL (*starting to rise*) What d'you mean?

MRS QUEEN 'Er bed's empty

MRS MCNEIL (*now on her feet*) Don't look like that, Mrs Queen She'll be in the bathroom

MRS QUEEN She's not She's not in the flat, Ma'am

MRS MCNEIL Nonsense She couldn't possibly have gone out without my hearing This door was open the whole time you were away Go and look again (*As she says this she, herself, moves toward the door*)

MRS QUEEN (*as she hurries away—off*) It's no use, Ma'am

[*Exit* MRS QUEEN

MRS MCNEIL (*reaching the door, calling*) Irene ! (*She listens*) Irene ! (*She listens again Getting no response, she hesitates, then comes back into the room and takes up the telephone receiver She dials and listens Evidently there is no response She replaces the receiver, waits and is about to take it off and dial again, when MRS QUEEN reappears*)

[*Enter* MRS QUEEN

MRS QUEEN She's not anywhere, Ma'am

MRS MCNEIL She must have wakened suddenly and seen how late it was She'll be on her way to school

MRS QUEEN She'd never go out without saying anything

MRS MCNEIL (*sharply*) She has Now, Mrs Queen, don't get up a story Her mother will be here any moment There's no need to alarm her

MRS QUEEN It's that cold out Eats right into your vitals

MRS MCNEIL (*dialling again*) Go and see what coat she's wearing

MRS QUEEN Yes, Ma'am

[MRS QUEEN *hurries away*

MRS McNEIL *finishes dialling and holds the receiver to her ear*

MRS McNEIL (*presently*) Is that the Convent? This is Mrs McNeil, Irene Lawrence's grandmother, speaking Has Miss Irene arrived yet? No, not Barbara I know she's there Irene Yes, I'll hold on (*Waits anxiously—presently*) Oh, Sister Millicent I just rang up to know if Irene's arrived at school yet? Yes, that's quite right We did mean to keep her at home, but we find she's gone out She must have wakened suddenly and discovered how late it was No, no There was nothing really the matter with her We called in the doctor to make sure We're just a little bit anxious because of the cold

[*Enter* MRS QUEEN *She waits for* MRS McNEIL *to finish*

If you'd be kind enough Oh, and, Sister—I shouldn't say anything to Barbara Thank you *Au revoir* (*Replaces receiver—turns to* MRS QUEEN) Yes?

MRS QUEEN She's put on the things that was on the chair, Ma'am

MRS McNEIL Which coat?

MRS QUEEN The fur coat's gone It was hanging in 'er wardrobe when I took out 'er dressing-gown last night

MRS McNEIL (*relieved*) That's all right That'll keep out the cold (*Forcing herself to be matter-of-fact*) Now get on with your work And for goodness' sake, Mrs Queen, when her mother comes don't look like that You'll frighten the life out of her

MRS QUEEN (*trying to keep control of herself*) I don't like it

[*Exit* MRS QUEEN *abruptly*

MRS McNEIL, *left alone, shows what she feels—more and more worried She dials the telephone again and waits with it to her ear*

MRS McNEIL (*presently*) Is that Dr Sloane's house ? Mrs McNeil again Could I trouble the Doctor to——? Gone out ? Oh, dear No, no message I daresay I'll see him before you do Thank you Good-bye (*She replaces the receiver, looking toward the door as she does so*)

[Enter MRS QUEEN

MRS QUEEN (*announcing*) Dr Sloane, Ma'am

[Enter DR SLOANE

MRS McNEIL (*showing her relief*) Oh, Doctor ! I've just been on to your house again I'm so glad you've come

DR SLOANE (*peering at her with a professional eye as he comes forward*) I thought Irene was the patient ?

MRS McNEIL (*her voice trembling a little*) Haven't you heard ?

DR SLOANE (*his eyes still on MRS McNEIL*) Got any sal volatile in the house, Mrs Queen ?

MRS QUEEN Not as I know of Sir

DR SLOANE Brandy ?

MRS QUEEN Yes Sir Medicine all (*Going over to corner cupboard*) Should be ere in this cupboard

DR SLOANE (*taking MRS McNEIL's wrist and feeling her pulse*) What's all this nonsense ? Eh ? (*To MRS QUEEN*) Got it ?

MRS QUEEN (*bringing out small flask of brandy and small medicine glass*) Yes, Sir

DR SLOANE (*taking both from her with a twinkle*) Strictly medicinal ! (*To MRS McNEIL*) I see Mrs Queen doesn't mean us to let ourselves go ! (*Pouring out dose and handing it to MRS McNEIL*)

Here we are (*As she hesitates*) Don't pretend you don't like it

MRS MCNEIL (*taking the glass with an attempt at a smile*) I don't usually indulge in the morning

DR SLOANE Down with it (*Watching Mrs McNEIL drink*) That's the way (*Taking glass from her*) How does it feel ?

MRS MCNEIL (*relinquishing glass*) Very nice indeed, thank you What about you ?

DR SLOANE Unfortunately I've no excuse (*Putting glass and flask on table*) Now then, what's all the fuss about ? By Mrs Queen's expression when she opened the door I expected a tragedy What do I find ? Irene's gone out without telling you ! Why shouldn't she ? Has she got to announce it every time she moves from the house in broad daylight ?

MRS MCNEIL (*rather shamefaced*) It does sound rather silly when you put it like that

DR SLOANE Extremely silly

MRS MCNEIL You did say she was to stay indoors for a day or two ?

DR SLOANE Did anybody take the trouble to tell her so ? Probably not

MRS MCNEIL She knew she wasn't expected to get up this morning

DR SLOANE Expected to—no But if she woke feeling fit as a fiddle the natural thing would be for her to get up and go off to school Wouldn't it ?

MRS MCNEIL (*thankful to hear him say so*) That's what I told Mrs Queen

MRS QUEEN I only 'ope you're right, Ma'am Nobody'd be more thankful than me Can I get you anything, Sir ? A cup of coffee ?

DR SLOANE You know how I appreciate your coffee

MRS QUEEN You've always bin very nice about it, Sir

DR SLOANE (*insinuating her out*) But not to day, thanks I ve not long had my breakfast

MRS QUEEN Thank you, Sir

[*Exit MRS QUEEN*]

DR SLOANE (*after closing the door*) Well ? Now we re alone What's going on in your mind ? Out with it

MRS McNEIL I'm frightened

DR SLOANE What of ?

MRS McNEIL It's so unlike her to go off like that

DR SLOANE We re all given to doing things that are not like us every once in a while

MRS McNEIL I shouldn t worry in the ordinary way But after last night——

DR SLOANE What happened last night ?

MRS McNEIL Something Baba said must have upset her She was beside herself—flew at Baba's throat and threatened to kill her——

DR SLOANE What had the little monkey been up to ?

MRS McNEIL We couldn t find out She declared nothing Whatever it was, it shouldn t have caused such an outburst I see it now She s been through too much lately Her mother s illness preyed on her mind Then the anxiety since Now the thought of the wedding this morning I'm just afraid she may have—(*forcing herself to say it*)—that she may have done some thing foolish—on the spur of the moment——

DR SLOANE (*patting her hand*) Don t you get such a thing into your head Whatever she s been through, or going through, when it comes to the point her love of life will assert itself It

isn't as if she were a morbid type At rock-bottom she's essentially healthy minded and sane

MRS McNEIL But is she ? She's much, much too sensitive I've always known it I've always been afraid of it I admit that, usually, she has self control That's what made it so—so shocking last night, when she let herself go I've been thinking If there's anything in pre natal influence, or in what's said nowadays about the first year or two being so important, what chance did she have at the start ? You know what kind of life her mother and father were living ? You know all that led up to it ?

DR SLOANE What rubbish have you been reading ?

MRS McNEIL (*with a quick wry smile*) Those books on psychology you lent me

DR SLOANE (*firmly*) Now listen to me There may be a grain of truth in what you say But against it there's been her upbringing since There have been things I don't approve of, as you know, but on the whole it's been sound She hasn't been thwarted she hasn't been over indulged You should see some of the youngsters I have to prescribe for They're so bored with life there's nothing left in it They've had it all There's been a lot said against the old order It had its drawbacks, God knows But it was a darn sight better than the new

MRS McNEIL (*restlessly*) Hadn't I better get on to the Convent again ?

DR SLOANE Again ?

MRS McNEIL I rang up just before you came to find out if she was there They did say they'd let me know I suppose as they haven't—

DR SLOANE Give the girl a chance She was asleep in her bed when you telephoned me not

more than twenty minutes ago That's right, isn't it ?

MRS McNEIL I took it for granted she was It was after that Mrs Queen found out she'd gone We've no idea when she went

DR SLOANE What time did you last see her ?

MRS McNEIL (*realising it for the first time*) Now I come to think of it I haven't actually seen her since I left her last night

DR SLOANE (*immediately on the alert*) Last night ?

MRS McNEIL I stayed with her till she quietened down After that I listened at the door every now and again Doctor—(*alarmed by a new fear*)—you don't think—— ?

DR SLOANE (*going to the door*) What about Mrs Queen ? (*Opening door, raising his voice slightly*) You there, Mrs Queen ?

MRS QUEEN (*off—in distance*) Yes, Doctor (*Pause Nearer*) Jist coming

[DR SLOANE *comes back into the room In another moment* MRS QUEEN *appears in the doorway Enter* MRS QUEEN

Yes, Sir ?

DR SLOANE (*turning*) When did you last see Irene, Mrs Queen ?

MRS QUEEN I took a peep every once in a while all through the night, Sir And jist before I went out this morning

DR SLOANE Did you see her ?

MRS QUEEN Well, no, Sir Not exactly It was too dark to see I didn't want to chance waking 'er, going close to the bed

DR SLOANE What time did Baba get up ?

MRS QUEEN Jist in time to get off late for school, Sir

DR SLOANE You saw Irene then, I suppose ?

MRS QUEEN No, Sir I'd took Miss Baba in my room with me After the fright she'd 'ad we thought it best she—— (*She stops short and glances at Mrs McNEIL, wondering if she has said too much*)

MRS McNEIL (*helping her out*) Doctor knows about it

DR SLOANE Didn't you have to go in this morning to get her some clothes?

MRS QUEEN No, Sir I'd took them along with me

DR SLOANE Then what it amounts to is that neither of you has actually seen her since last night?

MRS McNEIL (*all her fears on her again*) I'm afraid not

MRS QUEEN Oh, Ma'am!

DR SLOANE What time did you leave her?

MRS McNEIL It must have been—— (*She considers anxiously*)

DR SLOANE Before midnight?

MRS McNEIL Yes—definitely It was soon after I heard Big Ben strike eleven Doctor, we must do something about it before her mother comes

DR SLOANE I think the best thing is to—— (*He goes to the telephone*) I'll get my secretary to make some enquiries (*Lifts receiver—dials*)

MRS McNEIL Where?

DR SLOANE (*obliged to say it*) The police and the hospitals Now don't get alarmed If she's been wandering about on an empty stomach she may be a bit light-headed That's all it amounts to (*Puts receiver to ear and listens*) Has she anything on to identify her?

[MRS McNEIL looks questioningly at MRS QUEEN, who has been glancing with a startled expression from one to the other]

MRS QUEEN 'Ow do you mean, Sir ?

DR SLOANE Name on her clothes—laundry mark ? (*He replaces the receiver*)

MRS QUEEN I don't never send their things to the laundry—only the bed linen They don't 'ave to 'ave names on their clothes, not at the Convent

MRS McNEIL She s wearing her fur coat

DR SLOANE (*lifting receiver and dialling again*)
Fur coat ? Didn t know she had one

MRS McNEIL Her mother brought it from Paris A birthday present

DR SLOANE Keep her warm, anyhow (*Into receiver*) That you, Miss Fruen ? You know young Miss Lawrence ? Irene Could you describe her ?—Probably more accurately than any of the rest of us —She was wearing a fur coat Hold on a minute (*To Mrs McNEIL*) What kind of fur ?

MRS McNEIL Squirrel (*Or whatever the fur is*)

DR SLOANE (*after repeating name of fur into telephone*) What else ?

MRS QUEEN (*as Mrs McNEIL glances at her for assistance*) Er berry s [beret] gone Then there s the blouse and skirt she d on yesterday (*Describe them*) Er brown shoes and stockings (*Or as worn*) And underneath——

DR SLOANE That s enough to go on with (*Repeats description into telephone—then*) I want you to get on to the police and the hospitals Ask whether a young girl answering to that description has been found wandering about without being able to give an account of herself Any time since eleven o clock last night We don t know In point of fact, I shouldn t be the least surprised if at any moment she opened the door and walked in Then she could have a good laugh at us

[There is the sound of the hall door closing heavily They all look quickly towards it DR SLOANE, still holding the receiver, stops talking]

MRS McNEIL (*starting to rise—hopefully*) Perhaps——?

[Through the open doorway JENNIFER'S voice comes, first distant, then nearer MRS QUEEN goes to the room door]

JENNIFER (*off*) Better bring her into the sitting room It's warmer

[MRS McNEIL goes toward the door MRS QUEEN goes out]

DR SLOANE (*into receiver*) You there, Miss Fruen? Don't do anything unless you hear from me again

[Replaces receiver as MRS QUEEN comes back and stands holding the door wide as JENNIFER enters, carrying IRENE'S beret in her hand JENNIFER, without looking at anyone, goes hastily to the couch and rearranges the cushions so that they shall be more comfortable Then she waits with her eyes intent on the limp form of IRENE as SIR JOHN carries her into the room There is no sign of the fur coat]

As SIR JOHN lays IRENE down gently DR SLOANE goes to the couch JENNIFER, who has had no eyes for anyone except IRENE, sees him for the first time

JENNIFER (*tremendously relieved at the sight of DR SLOANE*) Oh, Doctor, thank God you're here!

DR SLOANE (*his eyes on IRENE*) Where's that brandy?

MRS McNEIL (*who is nearest—lifting the flask and glass with trembling hands*) Here——

[SIR JOHN takes them from her, pours out a little brandy and goes with the glass to DR SLOANE]

DR SLOANE (*taking the glass*) Get a rug, some one—and hot water bottles

MRS QUEEN Yes, Sir (*Hurries to door*)

JENNIFER (*also going quickly to door*) You see to the bottles, Mrs Queen I'll get the blankets

MRS QUEEN (*as they go*) The kettle is on, Madam

[*Exit JENNIFER and MRS QUEEN*]

DR SLOANE (*who is moistening IRENE's lips with the brandy and watching her intently—to SIR JOHN, who has taken off his overcoat*) Put an arm round her, will you! Hold her up (*As SIR JOHN does so*) Where did you find her?

SIR JOHN On the stairs Lying across the landing, half-way up the last flight Fortunately the lift had gone wrong again We shouldn't have seen her

JENNIFER (*coming in with blankets dragged from her bed*) How is she?

DR SLOANE Where are those bottles?

JENNIFER (*as they cover IRENE with the blankets*) Mrs Queen's bringing them

DR SLOANE (*ministering to IRENE*) Better take off her shoes Put more coal on the fire, someone

MRS McNEIL (*pathetically eager to be of use*) Let me

[*She limps over to the fireplace and replaces the coal she had removed*]

JENNIFER (*undoing IRENE's shoes and pulling one off*) Her stockings are wet through (*Drawing off the other shoe*) Her feet are frozen (*She removes stockings and starts to rub IRENE's feet and ankles*)

DR SLOANE Wet, did you say? How did that happen? It's perishing cold out—but it's dry

[*Enter MRS QUEEN with two rubber hot water bottles*]

MRS QUEEN (*hurrying to couch*) The bottles, Sir The kettle was on the boil

DR SLOANE (*taking a bottle and placing it on IRENE's heart*) The other at her feet (*With an attempt at a lighter note*) Have to risk chilblains

JENNIFER (*holding out a hand to MRS QUEEN*)
I'll do it (*Takes the second bottle and puts it at*
IRENE's feet)

SIR JOHN (*who is still supporting IRENE*) She's
moving——

DR SLOANE (*as IRENE's eyelids flicker*) That's
better ! That's what we've been looking for
(*Putting an ear close to her lips*) What did you say ?

IRENE (*shivering—almost inaudible*) It's so
cold——

DR SLOANE That's all right, me dear You'll
be warm enough in a minute Here—swallow
some of this (*Holds brandy to her lips*) Mostly
gone down your chin so far Can't have that,
you know—with drink the price it is these days

[*IRENE swallows painfully, coughs and shivers,*
then, as if her head is too heavy, lets it droop again

DR SLOANE *hands the glass to MRS QUEEN, who*
is on the alert to take it

What about that cup of coffee ? (*He pulls out a*
stethoscope from his pocket)

MRS QUEEN At once, Sir (*She puts down the*
glass and hurries to the door again)

[*Exit MRS QUEEN*

As DR SLOANE listens to IRENE's breathing,
JENNIFER watches him anxiously

DR SLOANE (*to JENNIFER*) Get me a sheet of
notepaper, will you ?

JENNIFER (*the words wrung from her—as she goes to*
the desk) Why was she allowed out ? A day like
this ?

MRS McNEIL (*piteously*) We didn't know We
thought she was in bed—asleep

JENNIFER No coat on—— !

MRS McNEIL (*incredulously*) No coat ? She was
wearing her fur coat, wasn't she ?

JENNIFER (*mechanically lifting writing pad and taking*
it to DR SLOANE) Not when we found her

[DR SLOANE takes the writing pad from JENNIFER He goes to table, seats himself, pulls out his fountain pen and writes

IRENE (*her voice husky but audible*) I threw it away

JENNIFER What did you say, darling ?

IRENE I threw my fur coat into the river

JENNIFER (*who thinks she is wandering*) Did you, darling ?

IRENE (*her voice rising with each sentence*) I couldn't do it It was so cold and black I went right down to the edge My feet sank into the mud (*Shrinking back against SIR JOHN her eyes filled with horror*) I saw a rat in the water

JENNIFER Oh, God ! What's she saying ?

[DR SLOANE rises and goes to the couch again

IRENE (*suddenly staring across the room*) Don't let him in ! (*Clutching hold of SIR JOHN*) Don't let him get in——

SIR JOHN (*protecting her*) Who, dear ?

IRENE (*panic stricken*) That man outside the window——

SIR JOHN (*soothingly*) There's no man outside the window

IRENE (*lowering her voice uncannily*) There is He's come to take her away Don't let him Please don't let him

JENNIFER (*in anguish*) Doctor—— ?

DR SLOANE Draw the curtains

[JENNIFER hastens to the window and does so
(To IRENE) We'll shut him out

SIR JOHN (*taking his cue from DR SLOANE—as the curtains are drawn across*) He's gone now

IRENE Has he ?

DR SLOANE Now the lights——

[JENNIFER switches on lights

SIR JOHN (*to IRENE*) Look for yourself (*As IRENE, still clinging to him, glances towards the window*) No one there? Is there?

IRENE No

SIR JOHN It was just a bad dream

IRENE Was it? (*Pause*) Where's Baba?

[*DR SLOANE goes back to table Finishes writing prescription*]

JENNIFER (*coming back to couch*) Baba's at school

IRENE Is she? Tell her I didn't mean it

JENNIFER (*gently*) Mean what?

IRENE Tell her I wouldn't hurt her Why did I want to hurt her?

JENNIFER You didn't You've been dreaming Now you're awake Everything's all right again

IRENE (*smiling at her, but without recognition*) Is it?

[*Enter MRS QUEEN with the coffee and a cup and saucer on a small tray*]

MRS QUEEN The coffee, Sir (*She goes over with it to the table*)

DR SLOANE Pour out half a cup Lots of sugar She's starving That's what's making her light headed

MRS QUEEN (*pouring coffee*) She hasn't had a bite since the day before yesterday

DR SLOANE (*glancing over prescription*) Thought as much!

MRS QUEEN Not that it hasn't been offered You said not to force her, Sir

JENNIFER (*coming to table and holding out her hand for cup and saucer*) Let me give it to her

DR SLOANE (*as MRS QUEEN gives JENNIFER the cup and saucer*) Slowly Try giving it her in the spoon (*As JENNIFER goes back to couch—handing prescription to MRS QUEEN*) Take this down to

the chemist. Tell them to send the things as soon as they're made up Bring the thermogene with you

MRS QUEEN (*taking prescription*) Yes, Sir

DR SLOANE When you come back light a fire in the bedroom

MRS QUEEN Yes, Sir I won't be gone above a minute, Sir

[MRS QUEEN *again hurries to the door Exit*

MRS MCNEIL (*preparing to rise*) I can see to the fire

DR SLOANE (*who knows she's exhausted*) You stop where you are, Alice There's no hurry She's all right for the time being

[MRS MCNEIL *sinks back into her chair again*
DR SLOANE *gives her a friendly smile, then turns to IRENE, who has managed to swallow some of the coffee He watches her with a professional eye*

That's the way! That's putting new life into you Let's feel the pulse again (*He puts a hand over the back of the couch and takes hold of her wrist*)

[JENNIFER and SIR JOHN *watch him*

Good We're warming up nicely The thaw has set in (*To JENNIFER*) Give her the rest (*He goes back to the table and starts writing again*) She'll be all right

SIR JOHN Let me hold the cup

[JENNIFER *hands it to him He puts it to IRENE's lips*

Perhaps you can manage to drink it out of this now—like a big girl

JENNIFER (*as IRENE drinks obediently*) Not too much at a time

SIR JOHN There isn't much left

IRENE (*unexpectedly—quite normal*) Hello, Mother?

JENNIFER (*her eyes lighting—leaning towards her eagerly—her voice tender and yearning*) Darling——

[MRS MCNEIL, *who seems to have become ten years older in the past hour, immediately becomes alert She glances toward the couch hopefully* DR SLOANE *stops writing* IRENE *looks at them with a smile of recognition*

IRENE Granny? Dr Sloane?

[*She comes back to* SIR JOHN, *stares at him with out recognition for a moment, then, memory returning, her smile fades She glances quickly from him to JENNIFER and back again She becomes aware that he is holding her and fiercely tries to release herself*

SIR JOHN (*allowing her to free herself, gently*) You know me, don't you? Why do you look at me like that?

IRENE (*with intense feeling*) Are you married to my mother?

SIR JOHN Yes (*Seeing her expression, not knowing quite what line to take, with a smile*) Is that a crime?

IRENE Yes It is

SIR JOHN (*humouring her*) Why?

IRENE You'd no right

SIR JOHN Why not? Do you think I won't make her happy?

IRENE She's no right to be happy with any man except Father

SIR JOHN (*gently*) But your father——?

IRENE I know He's dead When he was alive they were everything to each other They would have been again He was waiting for her Now she's got you

JENNIFER (*piteously*) Irene? My darling——?

IRENE (*shrinking back*) Don't touch me

JENNIFER (*aghast*) Irene——? I'm your mother—— (*As the truth impresses itself on her*) Oh, God, what have I done? (*Covering her mouth*)

with her hand as a sob breaks from her) What have I done ?

[SIR JOHN goes quickly to her She puts out a hand to ward him off]

SIR JOHN (*drawing back*) Jennifer ?

JENNIFER Not now, John (*Seeing his face—taking a quick step towards him*) It's not your fault It's mine I should have guessed I should have known (*Turning to IRENE*) Why didn't you tell me, dear ? Why didn't you tell me in time ?

IRENE What difference would it have made ?

JENNIFER All the difference in the world

IRENE You wanted to do it

MRS McNEIL I stopped her telling you, Jennifer

JENNIFER (*turning quickly*) You ? You knew ?

MRS McNEIL Yes

JENNIFER Why did you hide it from me ?

MRS McNEIL I wanted you to be happy

JENNIFER Happy ? With my own child feeling like this ?

MRS McNEIL You're my child

[*Short silence* JENNIFER strives to control herself
MRS McNEIL goes on]

I hoped you'd never know

JENNIFER How could I help knowing—(*with bitterness for her own blindness*)—as soon as I had eyes to see !

MRS McNEIL I hoped it was because it was all so sudden—so new I believed she'd get over it

JENNIFER I could have waited She and I could have talked it out together—as we've always talked about everything, frankly and openly There's always been truth between us

DR SLOANE (*quietly*) Truth ? Has there ?

JENNIFER (*emphatically*) Yes

DR SLOANE You're sure of that ? What about the fairy tale that s at the root of this trouble ?

JENNIFER What fairy tale ?

DR SLOANE You know

JENNIFER (*scarcely audible*) I did what I thought was for the best

DR SLOANE (*gently*) I know you did, me dear That s the pity of it

JENNIFER (*after a moment's silence, despair in her voice*) Why should everything we live for go wrong ?

SIR JOHN (*longing to take her in his arms and comfort her*) Jennifer—— ?

JENNIFER (*appealing to him to understand*) Go away now, will you ? Leave us alone (*As he continues to look at her compassionately*) Please—— ?

SIR JOHN (*after an instant s hesitation*) Send for me when you want me

[*They look at one another for a moment longer, then he turns and goes toward the door*]

DR SLOANE, *who has been facing the problem of whether what he has to say might be for good or ill, makes up his mind*

DR SLOANE (*before SIR JOHN can reach the door*) One moment, Sir John Don't go yet

[*SIR JOHN pauses He waits for DR SLOANE to go on*]

It's time Irene knew the facts

[*MRS McNEIL makes a movement of protest, JENNIFER is unable to find her voice quickly enough He turns to IRENE*]

You're wrong about your father He——

JENNIFER No—no ! (*In agony of mind*) Don't take that away from her, too

DR SLOANE I must We must get rid of this obsession It's too dangerous Look what it's done

MRS McNEILL (*gently, as JENNIFER turns to her helplessly*) He's right, Jennifer

SIR JOHN The child's all in She can't stand it

DR SLOANE I take the responsibility

[*He goes to IRENE, holding her gaze intently, using all his will power to make her react as he hopes against hope she may*]

Your father was a very gallant soldier—a very lovable young man But he did not make your mother happy He caused her a great deal of suffering—perhaps through no fault of his own He lived at a time when life was too difficult (*Short pause*) They loved each other, but not as you think Your mother very often had good reason to be lonely and sad (*Short pause*) When he died, as you know, she was left with two babies to fight for She has done that with courage Even you, who are so sensitive, can't know how hard the struggle has been She has made light of it—for your sake—so that you could grow up without the burden of her anxieties on your mind That's the sort of courage we want from you now—the courage that makes you take up your life again after everything you cared for seems to have gone (*Short pause*) What about it?

IRENE (*intensely*) I don't believe what you say of my father

DR SLOANE Yes, you do

IRENE I don't—I don't——!

DR SLOANE You and I have known each other since I brought you into the world Would I lie to you?

IRENE (*after a struggle with herself, in a desperate whisper*) No

DR SLOANE Then——

JENNIFER (*at breaking point*) I can't bear it
(*She sinks down beside the couch, burying her face*
Sobs choke her)

IRENE (*who has never seen her mother cry before*)
Mother—don't ! Don't cry, Mummie——

JENNIFER (*inarticulately*) I was going to be able
to do so much for you—to give you such a lovely
life ! Now it's all—no use——

IRENE I didn't mean you to know—ever I was
just going to end it Then everything would
have been all right——

JENNIFER All right ? My baby—— !

IRENE I know I've been silly—and selfish——

DR SLOANE You've just been very young I
hope, and believe, you've grown up now

IRENE I know you're right and I'm wrong
But I—I just can't help my feelings

DR SLOANE You can put your feelings on
one side That's what growing up means

IRENE (*looking down at JENNIFER's bowed head,*
after a struggle with herself making her sacrifice
She looks across at SIR JOHN) Don't leave her——
Don't go——

[*As the curtain falls she turns her head away to hide*
her sudden tears JENNIFER raises her head SIR
JOHN, his eyes on JENNIFER, comes slowly towards
the couch DR SLOANE, with a sigh of relief, takes
out his handkerchief to wipe his brow He glances
across at MRS McNEIL She gives him a tremulous
smile

END OF PLAY

THE DISTAFF SIDE

John van Druten

THE DISTAFF SIDE

A Play

In Three Acts

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To
THE MEMORY OF
MY MOTHER

The Distaff Side was first performed at the King's Theatre, Edinburgh, on August 14th, 1933, with the following cast

<i>Mrs Venables</i>		HAIDÉE WRIGHT
<i>Mrs Millward</i>	} <i>her</i> <i>daugh</i> <i>ters</i>	SYBIL THORNDIKE
<i>Mrs Frobisher</i>		MARTITA HUNT
<i>Mrs Fletcher</i>		DOROTHY HOLMES GORE
<i>Roland</i>	} <i>Mrs Millward's</i> <i>children</i>	ALEXANDER ARCHDALE
<i>Alex</i>		VIOLA KEATS
<i>Christopher Venables</i>	} <i>cousins</i>	ROBERT HORTON
<i>Theresa Venables</i> (his sister)		MARGARET CARTER
<i>Miss Spicer</i>		DORA BARTON
<i>Rose</i>		MAUD BUCHANAN
<i>Toby Chegwidde</i>		CLIFFORD EVANS
<i>Charles Hubbard</i>		GEOFFREY GOMER
<i>Gilbert Baize</i>		EDGAR NORFOLK

Directed by AURIOL LEE

CHARACTERS

MRS VENABLES

MRS MILLWARD (EVIE)	} her daughters
MRS FROBISHER (LIZ)	
MRS FLETCHER (NELLIE)	

ROLAND	} Mrs Millward's children
ALEX	

CHRISTOPHER VENABLES	} cousins
THERESA VENABLES (his sister)	

MISS SPICER

ROSE

TOBY CHEGWIDDEN

CHARLES HUBBARD

GILBERT BAIZE

SCENES

ACT I

Sitting-room in Mrs Millward's house in
St John's Wood, London Monday evening

ACT II

SCENE I The same Thursday afternoon

SCENE II Mrs Millward's bedroom Late
Thursday night

ACT III

SCENE I Same as Act I Friday afternoon

SCENE II Mrs Millward's bedroom Early
Saturday morning

ACT I

SCENE *Mrs Millward's house in St John's Wood*

TIME *Ten o'clock in the evening*

The scene is a sitting room on the ground floor of one of the large houses in or near Avenue Road

In the back wall is a big bay window looking out on to the front garden, with its semi circular drive from the front gate to the front door At present, however, the curtains are drawn

Below the window is a large chesterfield

In the centre of the R wall (R from the actor's view point) is the fireplace, with a club fender The door (either single or double) to the hall is in the centre of the opposite wall Above it on the slant in the corner formed by the back and L wall is Mrs Millward's desk, with a swivel chair The desk has the telephone on it

When the curtain rises, MRS MILLWARD (Evie) and MRS VENABLES (her mother) are alone on the stage

MRS MILLWARD is a graceful, pretty and charming woman of fifty She is very nicely, simply, but quite expensively dressed in an afternoon frock She sits in an armchair facing the fire and is reading

MRS VENABLES is a bumpy old lady of seventy-five, dressed in black She sits in an armchair above the fire, reading a novel leaning sideways and forward towards the fire Beside her on a little table are her bag, glasses case, and a little dish of sweets, etc

After a moment MRS VENABLES looks up from her novel

MRS VENABLES Evie ' Listen to this ' (*She reads aloud*) " Elspeth stood at the cottage door, and watched her lover go, tall and straight, into the sunset She knew now she would never see

him again As he turned the bend of the road, a bird began to sing The end " (*She shuts the book with a snap*) I've never read such twaddle in all my life

MRS MILLWARD (*looking up with a smile*) What is it ?

MRS VENABLES Some rubbish from the library I don't believe it was on my list at all The trash people write nowadays What are *you* reading ?

MRS MILLWARD This ? It's a book on education

MRS VENABLES What do you want to read that for ? Your children are grown up

MRS MILLWARD I know, but it's interesting It's by Bertrand Russell

MRS VENABLES Who's he ? A schoolmaster ? Let me look

MRS MILLWARD (*handing the book across with a smile*) You are extraordinary, Mother You always want the book that somebody else is reading

MRS VENABLES Oh, all right, then I don't want to see it

MRS MILLWARD Oh, Mother (*MRS VENABLES takes the book*)

[*ROSE, the parlourmaid, comes in with a tray of whiskey, barley-water, and a glass of hot milk She puts the tray on the desk*

MRS MILLWARD Miss Alex isn't back yet, Rose ?

ROSE I haven't heard her, madam

MRS MILLWARD Thank you

[*ROSE goes out MRS MILLWARD goes over and pours some whiskey into the glass of milk MRS VENABLES looks up and watches her As MRS MILLWARD puts down the decanter MRS VENABLES raises an eyebrow MRS MILLWARD smilingly*

adds a little more whiskey and takes the glass across to MRS VENABLES

MRS VENABLES (*biting a chocolate*) Oh ! A hard one ! *You have it, Evie !*

MRS MILLWARD Thank you, Mother (*She puts it on the tray*)

MRS VENABLES (*after a moment with Bertrand Russell*) I can't make head or tail of this It seems to be all about Russia

MRS MILLWARD Not all

MRS VENABLES Well, all I've found What's *that* got to do with children ? Here You can have it back (MRS MILLWARD *takes it* MRS VENABLES *takes up her milk*) Where did you get it from, anyway ?

MRS MILLWARD Theresa lent it to me She's trying to interest me in her work

MRS VENABLES You leave that sort of thing to women like her who've never been able to get married

MRS MILLWARD You know Theresa's quite an important woman, Mother I'm rather proud of having her as a cousin She's very highly thought of

MRS VENABLES Yes, and what does she look like ? Her ankles ! Do you want to be like that ?

MRS MILLWARD (*with a smile*) I think I've got very nice ankles (*She looks at them*)

MRS VENABLES (*with a grim smile*) You fancy yourself, don't you ?

MRS MILLWARD (*also smiling*) I think I'm a very attractive woman for the mother of grown up children

MRS VENABLES And a lot of good may it do you I wish your grown up children would come in—or one of them, anyway And bring his aunt with him Do you suppose he's *still* hanging

about at Victoria Station ? What's Liz want to cross Dover-Ostend this time of year for ? And what's she been doing in Brussels, anyway ? That's not on her way from the Riviera

MRS MILLWARD Mother dear, you know I don't know We had that out when her telegram came

MRS VENABLES And where's Spicer ? That old fool's late, too

MRS MILLWARD It's only just ten

MRS VENABLES (*looking at her watch, which is pinned to her dress*) It's seven minutes past I shall speak to her I can't think what she does with her time off, anyway She doesn't know anyone

[Enter MISS SPICER

She is MRS VENABLES' companion, a pale, thin, faded, but unremittingly cheerful spinster of fifty She wears very unbecoming outdoor things

Oh, there you are

SPICER (*brightly*) I'm so sorry if I'm late It's foggy out The bus could hardly get along I hope you've had a happy day, dear Mrs Frobisher hasn't arrived ?

MRS MILLWARD Not yet Roland telephoned from the station that the train was going to be late

SPICER Oh, what a shame (*Gaily*) That'll be on account of the fog, I expect (*To MRS VENABLES*) You're not going to wait up, dear ?

MRS VENABLES No When I've finished my milk you can put me to bed What have you been doing with yourself ?

SPICER Oh, just pottering

MRS MILLWARD All alone ?

SPICER Yes, but I like that, you know I love poking about and making up little stories about the people I see And then when it began to turn foggy I went to the Polytechnic, that Indian Expedition picture, you know

MRS VENABLES What did you want to go to that for ? You knew I wanted to see it Now you ll have to sit through it all again, to say nothing of wasting your money into the bargain

SPICER Miss Venables said something about taking you to it one afternoon as a little extra treat for your birthday

MRS VENABLES It s the first I've heard of it

SPICER Oh, perhaps I shouldn't have said anything

[Enter ALEX MILLWARD

She is twenty one, and very attractive She wears an afternoon dress and a hat and coat

ALEX Good evening, everybody Good evening, Grandma Hello, Mother (*She kisses her*)

MRS VENABLES Where have you been all day ?

ALEX Oh, out and about You didn t mind my not coming back to dinner, Mother ?

MRS MILLWARD Of course not Where did you go ?

ALEX I met Charles Hubbard at the cocktail-party and he took me on to dinner at the Ivy

MRS VENABLES Charles Hubbard ? That's a new one, isn t it ?

ALEX About two weeks

MRS VENABLES Your other young man rang up for you

ALEX Who ?

MRS MILLWARD (*simultaneously with ALEX's*

"Who?" Oh, yes I was going to tell you Toby Chegwiddden

ALEX What did he want? Anything special?

MRS MILLWARD Something very special He's got some news for you

ALEX What?

MRS MILLWARD He wants to tell you himself He's coming round here later I said you'd be back about ten

ALEX Oh, I'm going out again I've just time to change, and Charles is calling for me We're going to a party

MRS VENABLES This new young man seems very attentive

ALEX He is, Grandma *Very* attentive

MRS VENABLES Well, I hope he's tidier than your other friend Who is he?

ALEX He's Seton Hubbard's son

MRS VENABLES And who may Seton Hubbard be?

ALEX The playwright, Grandma I was in his last play You saw me in it

MRS VENABLES Looked for you in it, you mean So he wrote that, did he? And the son takes you out to dances Perhaps he'll get his father to write a bigger part for you next time

ALEX That's passed through *my* mind, too

MRS VENABLES And what does the son do, when he's at home?

ALEX He almost never is, Grandma He's much too social and important

MRS VENABLES (*finishing her milk*) Well, I'm going to bed

ALEX (*during the movement of MRS VENABLES collecting her goods and being helped out of her chair*)
Oughtn't Aunt Liz to be here by now ?

MRS MILLWARD The train's late

MRS VENABLES (*as she rises*) You can come and look in on me when you're dressed, and let me see your party frock

ALEX I will

MRS VENABLES (*to MRS MILLWARD*) I won't say good night, Evie You'll come up with Liz I expect

MRS MILLWARD Unless she's too late

SPICER You mustn't lie awake too long, dear (*She collects MRS VENABLES' belongings*) Mrs Frobisher mustn't come and excite you to night Wouldn't it be better to wait and see her in the morning ?

MRS VENABLES (*ignoring this To MRS MILLWARD*) You'll bring her up when she comes, Evie (*MISS SPICER gives a sort of appealing look to MRS MILLWARD, and MRS MILLWARD makes a reassuring face*) You needn't make faces behind my back, either Come along, for goodness' sake I don't want to wait all night

MRS MILLWARD (*as they go out*) Good night Miss Spicer

SPICER Good night, Mrs Millward, dear, Good night, Alex

ALEX Good night, Miss Spicer

[*Exeunt MRS VENABLES and MISS SPICER*]

My God ! I wouldn't be Spicer for a lot Fancy undressing Grandma !

MRS MILLWARD (*laughing*) Alex ! (*She moves into MRS VENABLES' chair and slips to one side, where MRS VENABLES' method of sideways sitting has worn down the springs*) Goodness ! This is uncomfortable

ALEX Yes Grandma always sits with a list ,
port

MRS MILLWARD She's ruined the chair for
anyone else

ALEX Do you know, I shouldn't be surprised
if that wasn't her idea What did Toby want,
Mother ? Do you know ?

MRS MILLWARD Yes, I know, but I promised
I d let him tell you

ALEX Mother, don't be annoying

MRS MILLWARD No I said I wouldn t tell
you, and I won't How fond are you of Toby ?

ALEX Fond ? I don t know Why ? Very fond

MRS MILLWARD And this Mr Hubbard ?
You've been out with him a lot lately

ALEX Mother, what are you driving at ?

MRS MILLWARD Nothing It's seemed to me
you've been rather off Toby recently

ALEX No

MRS MILLWARD Well, neglecting him for
Mr Hubbard

ALEX I should have thought you'd have been
glad if I had found someone more eligible
Charles is a wealthy young man and influential
too

MRS MILLWARD Is he at all serious ?

ALEX Is any rich young man ever serious ?

MRS MILLWARD Well, you'd better go and
get dressed for him, hadn't you ?

ALEX I ll go in a minute You're waiting up
for Aunt Liz ? I m quite thrilled at the idea of
seeing her again

MRS MILLWARD So am I

ALEX You know, she used to be my idea of everything that was smart and fascinating Roland and I used to think she was fast

MRS MILLWARD (*with a faintly embarrassed smile*) Well, in a sort of way, I suppose she is

ALEX Oh, for an aunt But I'm not thrilled any more at the idea of people living together

MRS MILLWARD Nobody asked you to be thrilled ever

ALEX Oh, but I was shocked, too Do you remember when I first discovered it and tackled you? You were so sweet, Mother, the way you evaded me And then, when you did tell me, very seriously, that Liz and Gillie weren't married, you made it so solemn that I blushed for about two days and went off into corners by myself to think Was it on *my* account that Gillie never came with Liz while Father was alive?

MRS MILLWARD In a way, yes

ALEX Father hated Gillie, didn't he?

MRS MILLWARD Not hated He resented the position for Liz

ALEX The scandal of being divorced, you mean? But he didn't blame *her*?

MRS MILLWARD Not really She'd been very unhappy with her husband

ALEX (*with a sudden kind of inward fierceness*) Has there got to be an excuse?

MRS MILLWARD What do you mean? Liz should never have married Fred It was always Gillie she wanted

ALEX (*surprised*) Did she know him before?

MRS MILLWARD Yes They met at a dance soon after she came out Then, when they discovered he was married, Grandma and Grandpa

stopped her seeing him and she made up her mind to marry the first good looking man who asked her When Gillie turned up again ten years later well, you know about that

ALEX How much more romantic all the affairs of your generation sound I suppose it's because you had so many more principles If Father had lived, I wonder what he'd have thought of *me* now ?

MRS MILLWARD Of you ?

ALEX My being on the stage the people I go around with I think you're pretty marvellous the way you've adapted yourself

[The horn of a car is heard]

There they are There's the car

MRS MILLWARD Run and meet them Roland will have his key

ALEX *(at the door)* Is Gillie with her, by the way ?

MRS MILLWARD I don't know

[ALEX runs out]

MRS MILLWARD *takes the milk glass from the small table, puts it on the tray and goes into the hall*

Outside are heard sounds of excited greetings between ALEX and LIZ, and then between the two sisters

ALEX *(off)* Aunt LIZ Hello

LIZ *(off)* Alex, darling How nice But not Aunt ' I can't bear it I'm much too old to be called Aunt any more *(Sounds of kisses)* Evie darling How are you ? *(More kisses)* I thought we should never get here It's hours late

MRS MILLWARD *(off)* Oh, LIZ, it is nice to see you Are you alone ?

LIZ *(off)* Yes All alone

MRS MILLWARD (*off*) Come in Mr Roland will help with the luggage, Rose

LIZ (*off*) Isn't this fun ?

[MRS MILLWARD *returns with LIZ and ALEX*

LIZ (MRS FROBISHER) *is about forty five , very smart, rather Continental looking She is not nearly as pretty as her sister, but far more fascinating and chic She has a gay, rather silly, extravagant manner of speech, underlining her words, and bubbles with high spirits She wears extremely smart travelling clothes*

MRS MILLWARD Let me look at you (*She looks at LIZ s clothes*) Oh, LIZ, it s terribly smart

LIZ My dear, I was born in it and filthy (*She dusts herself*) You look very nice, Alex
Pretty Very West End actress

ALEX Thank you, LIZ

LIZ But I m so disappointed you re not acting now

ALEX So am I

LIZ Are you good ?

ALEX Nobody s offered me Lady Macbeth yet

LIZ Darling, you played it when you were fifteen I saw you at school Don't you remember ?

ALEX I blush whenever I think of it Liz dear, I'm terribly sorry, but I've got to dress to go out But you're making a proper stay, aren't you ? I ll see you lots ? Will you forgive me ?

LIZ Of course

[ALEX *goes*

She's sweet Has she got a young man ?

MRS MILLWARD . She's got several

LIZ Anything serious ?

MRS MILLWARD Well, I think there's a little situation on the horizon at the moment

LIZ Oh, tell me

MRS MILLWARD Another time

LIZ Oh, Eve darling (*putting her arm round her*)
It's fun to be here (*She looks round*) You haven't changed a thing But it's very nice And spot lessly clean

MRS MILLWARD I should hope so

LIZ After the mess of the villa Things
collect on me so Where s Mother ?

MRS MILLWARD Gone to bed

LIZ That let s me off to night, doesn't it ?

MRS MILLWARD Don t you believe it

LIZ Have I got to go up ? (*Makes a face*) Oh dear Well, give me a minute How is she ?

MRS MILLWARD Quite well Just the same

LIZ How you put up with her all the time !
And seventy five on Thursday I haven't got a present for her yet

MRS MILLWARD We ll go shopping to morrow

[Enter ROSE

ROSE Could I have Mrs Frobisher's keys, madam ?

LIZ Oh, yes (*She gets them out of her bag*)

MRS MILLWARD Is all the luggage upstairs ?

ROSE Mr Roland s carrying up the heavy suitcase now

LIZ I *am* making him work Driving the car down ! He tells me Nightingale's got 'flu

MRS MILLWARD There's an awful lot about

LIZ I heard some on the train Here you are,
Rose (*Hands her the keys*) Be careful of the little
lizard skin bag It's got all my bottles in

ROSE (*taking the keys*) Very good, madam

LIZ I don't know what state you'll find every
thing in The Customs were frightful I believe
those men get a kick out of underclothes, the
way they behaved with mine They'll all want
ironing

ROSE I'll see to it, madam (*ROSE goes out*)

LIZ How does one smuggle a motor-car?

MRS MILLWARD What do you mean?

LIZ It was one of the things on the list "Par
rots and motor cars must be produced I knew
a woman who tried to smuggle a parrot in, once
She had it inside her coat, and, just as she got
to the Customs man, her bust said Scratch
a Poll!" (*MRS MILLWARD laughs*)

MRS MILLWARD You are a fool, Liz Where
did you leave Gillie, by the way?

LIZ Down south

MRS MILLWARD Is he all right?

LIZ As far as I know

MRS MILLWARD What were you doing in
Brussels?

[*Enter ROLAND*]

He is MRS MILLWARD'S son, twenty two, a
little off hand and casual

MRS MILLWARD Is everything all right,
Roland?

ROLAND Yes, I think so (*To Liz*) What have
you got in that suitcase of yours? Sand? I want
a drink Will you have one?

LIZ Yes, please

MRS MILLWARD Did Roland find you all right
at the station?

ROLAND I looked where the men were thickest
She was surrounded

LIZ I always seem to run into people I know when I travel

ROLAND The Freemasonry of the *Wagon Lit*

LIZ I was thrilled to have anyone so young and attractive as Roland come and meet me You know, you d never think, to look at him, that he knows all the disgusting things he must about women s insides

ROLAND (*giving her a drink*) You'd never think, to look at the *outsides*—

LIZ How long have you still got before you know it *all* ?

ROLAND About another two years

LIZ Goodness ! Are we as complicated as all *that* ? One day I want you to draw me an exact diagram of everything I've got and tell me just how it works

ROLAND We'll have a nice new parlour game like Snakes and Ladders , call it 'Through the Large Intestine '

MRS MILLWARD Roland don't be revolting

ROLAND (*finding the chocolate on the tray*) Hullo, what's this doing here ?

MRS MILLWARD Oh, that's grandma's chocolate It was a hard one

ROLAND I thought Spicer came in for the hard ones

MRS MILLWARD Yes, well, it was Spicer's evening out, so I got it

ROLAND Well, I'll go and put the car to bed (*He goes out*)

LIZ You've nice children, Evie Are Roland and Alex friends ?

MRS MILLWARD (*shrugging*) Brother and sister Now ! Tell me about yourself How is Gillie ? I didn't know if he was coming with you (*A very long pause*) Is anything the matter ?

LIZ I've left him

MRS MILLWARD What ?

LIZ I've left him

MRS MILLWARD When ?

LIZ Two weeks ago

MRS MILLWARD LIZ ! Why ?

LIZ (*a little theatrically*) I d had just too much
You know what Gillie is what he's always
been

MRS MILLWARD (*tentatively*) Women ?

LIZ They flatter him and he falls for it He
always says they don't *mean* anything to him
If that's true, then why do it ? What does it
make *me* look like ? His behaviour's all of a
piece He's in with the most frightful crowd ,
expects me to run with them Lets them sponge
on him , goes on some awful bat with his win
nings when he wins and then, if I com
plain, tells me I nag him to death

MRS MILLWARD Oh, LIZ

LIZ Well, I do complain We had a climax two
weeks ago perfectly calm and reasoned
at least *I* was But it seems to me obvious that
if he cared for me he wouldn't do it, knowing
how I hate it He does do it Therefore he doesn't
care for me Well that's all right with me

MRS MILLWARD Don't *you* care for *him* any
more ?

LIZ (*violently*) I hate and loathe and despise
him It's true, Evie

MRS MILLWARD Did you tell him you were
leaving him ? (LIZ *nods*) What did he say ?

LIZ Swore at me, and said, ' Good riddance '

MRS MILLWARD Well I rather think it is
for you

LIZ I know it is I only wish to God I'd done
it before years before, when you and Henry
begged me to I'm getting old, Evie

MRS MILLWARD (*smiling*) What rubbish

LIZ It isn't rubbish (*She takes out her pocket mirror*) Look at me What a sight I am

MRS MILLWARD You look very nice Is that why you went to Brussels ? (*Liz nods*) But why Brussels ?

LIZ Eve, what would you say if I told you I thought of marrying again ?

MRS MILLWARD (*with a little surprise, but genuine feeling*) I'd be very glad

LIZ Well, then I think I am

MRS MILLWARD (*excited*) Liz dear ! Who ?

LIZ He's a Belgian, a widower His name's De Bruyn

MRS MILLWARD Where did you meet him ?

LIZ At Cannes, last spring He was with his sister Then, later, he came back alone Now he wants me to marry him

MRS MILLWARD Are you in love with him ?

LIZ (*with a giggle*) Eve dear ! If you *saw* him !

MRS MILLWARD What's the matter with him ?

LIZ He's a Belgian ! He's (*searching for a word*) funny

MRS MILLWARD Then

LIZ Oh, but he's kind He's been a saint to me He's enormously rich He's got a place in the Ardennes, and a house on the Avenue Louise I've been there the last two weeks, staying with him and his sister

MRS MILLWARD It will mean your living in Brussels ?

LIZ I shan't mind that He travels a lot

MRS MILLWARD You *are* fond of him ?

LIZ I tell you he's kind He's kindness itself

MRS MILLWARD But the the other side
the physical side ?

LIZ (*with a laugh*) Oh, that !

MRS MILLWARD Can you dismiss it like that ?

LIZ As if that made any difference ! Isn't that
all that Gillie and I have ever had in common,
really, and what good has it done us ? I don't
suppose Marcel would be (*with a tiny giggle*)
exorbitant in his demands He isn't young And,
after all, one has to take the rough with the
smooth in life

MRS MILLWARD (*with a little smile*) Well, if
that's how you look at it

LIZ It's all very well for you, Evie You've had
your husband whom you loved It lasted for you

MRS MILLWARD (*a shade bitterly*) Lasted !

LIZ You had him for over twenty years You've
still got your home and your children What's
my life been since I left home ? Egypt and the
Army, with Fred Then all the bust up of the
divorce And now these last ten years with Gillie
I want to grow roots like you

MRS MILLWARD I never expected to hear you
say that

LIZ No more did I

MRS MILLWARD When are you going to do
it ?

LIZ That I don't know But soon quite
soon (*A little violently*) What have I got to wait
for ?

MRS MILLWARD Nothing

LIZ (*suspiciously*) Eve, I don't believe you really
approve

MRS MILLWARD Liz dear, I do

LIZ You've something in the back of your
mind

MRS MILLWARD It's only that you're not in love with him, and perhaps that's silly of me I'd be very happy to see you married And if he's all you say, good and kind and fond of you——

LIZ And rich !

MRS MILLWARD Then I agree that you'd be very foolish not to (*She kisses her*) I hope you'll be very very happy

LIZ (*over cheerily*) Oh, I know it's the right thing for me to do I want you to meet him He came over with me He s at the Savoy

[*Enter MISS SPICER*

Oh, hello ? How are you, Miss Spicer ?

SPICER I'm very well, thank you, Mrs Frobisher I hope you are Did you have a dreadful crossing ?

LIZ (*patiently*) No Quite calm Just foggy

SPICER (*brightly*) Oh Well that's better than it being rough, isn't it ? (*To MRS MILLWARD*) Mrs Millward dear, Mrs Venables is getting a little well, anxious You see, she heard the car arrive and well, she wants Mrs Frobisher to come up She's *in* bed

MRS MILLWARD I'm afraid we've been chattering

SPICER I told her you'd probably have lots to say to each other

LIZ And she said why couldn't we say it up there ?

SPICER Well, yes, Mrs Frobisher As a matter of fact she did

LIZ Well, tell her we'll be up in just a minute

SPICER You won't keep her awake long, will you ?

LIZ I'll just pop *in* and *out*

SPICER (*smiling*) I don't think she'll like *that*

LIZ Are you keeping well, Miss Spicer ?

SPICER Oh, yes, very, thank you

LIZ You don't look a day older

SPICER (*hanging on to the door handle*) That's very nice of you, Mrs Frobisher You're looking very well yourself

[MISS SPICER *goes*

LIZ (*rising, and finishing her drink*) Don't tell Mother all this about me just yet Are the celebrations going to be very grim this year ?

MRS MILLWARD The usual with perhaps a shade more trimming because she's seventy five We're going to the Palace

LIZ What's on ?

MRS MILLWARD A musical play

LIZ How many of us ?

MRS MILLWARD Ten

LIZ Theresa and Christopher, I suppose ? Is Christopher as attentive as ever ?

MRS MILLWARD To Mother do you mean ?

LIZ Evie ! Has he ever actually asked you to marry him ?

MRS MILLWARD Good gracious, no

LIZ You're past the age when it matters about being cousins now Besides, Theresa is a specialist on birth control

MRS MILLWARD (*with a laugh*) Liz, don't be disgusting

LIZ (*jokingly*) I don't know why you two *don't* marry

MRS MILLWARD I've told you before I don't want to get married

LIZ When does Sister Nellie arrive ?

MRS MILLWARD I'm waiting to hear

LIZ How many of her frightful children is she bringing ?

MRS MILLWARD Only one Christine

LIZ Christine (*Makes a face imitating* CHRISTINE) And the Professor ?

MRS MILLWARD He can't get away He's got a Faculty Meeting

LIZ (*flippantly*) Isn't that too bad !

MRS MILLWARD I don't know why you don't like Arthur

LIZ His socks come down

MRS MILLWARD Give him some suspenders then

LIZ He won't wear them He thinks they're effeminate

MRS MILLWARD Oh ! You've offered them !

LIZ No, but he told me, once I hate hairy shins And he always shows his front stud

MRS MILLWARD Well Nellie likes him

LIZ I know she used to think him romantic But after four children and, living in New castle among all those professors' wives

[*Enter* ROSE

ROSE Mr Chegwidden, madam

[*Enter* TOBY CHEGWIDDEN

He is a young man of twenty seven slight in build, untidy and careless in his dress He is eager, excitable and rather self centred

MRS MILLWARD Oh, Toby, Alex is still up stairs dressing She's got to go out I told her you were coming She won't be long Liz this is Mr Chegwidden My sister, Mrs Frobisher

LIZ (*holding out her hand*) Mr ?

TOBY Chegwidden I'm sorry (*To MRS MILLWARD*) Where s Alex going ?

MRS MILLWARD To a party I think

TOBY Oh I d hoped she d come out with me
You didn't tell her ?

MRS MILLWARD Your news ? (*Smiling*) No
Have a drink, won t you ? Help yourself

TOBY Thanks I feel a little drunk already
Excitement, I think

MRS MILLWARD Of course

LIZ (*while TOBY s back is turned at the drink table, making signs with her head to MRS MILLWARD*)
You spoke of (*she gesticulates with her head towards TOBY*) a situation Is er er (*more gesticulation*) ?

MRS MILLWARD (*with a smile, nodding*)
Partly (*LIZ looks with interest at TOBY s back*)

LIZ What does Mr Chegwidden do ?

TOBY (*turning round*) Do ?

LIZ (*gesticulating with her hands*) Yes do
Paint or play or act or something

MRS MILLWARD He s just off to Hollywood

LIZ Oh An actor, then ?

TOBY (*with a smile*) Nothing so ephemeral
(*LIZ raises her eyebrows at the word*) I'm a picture
director at least, I shall be there

LIZ Has this just happened ?

TOBY Yes, as a matter of fact it was a film
I made about six months ago One of their men
saw it, and some of my other work, and he s
offered me a job under him He's a director
Hegerman He wants me to work with him,
become assistant director

LIZ What sort of a film did you make ?

MRS MILLWARD It was a very good film

LIZ Yes But what ?

TOBY It was a sort of impression of Hyde Park on a summer morning, and the people You know the orators and the Row bathers in the Serpentine babies and nurses——

LIZ What a good idea

TOBY Oh, I'm glad you think so

LIZ Isn't making a film very expensive ?

TOBY I borrowed a lot of the stuff There weren't any actors, you see, except Alex and me and all the people who didn't know they were acting

LIZ What did you do in it ?

MRS MILLWARD Oh, that was rather charming They sort of went through the picture among all the people, in different scenes, separately, but noticing each other

LIZ And met and married in the end ?

TOBY Good God, no !

LIZ What did happen in the end ?

TOBY Well, she met a friend, and I got on a bus

LIZ *How* exciting !

MRS MILLWARD Liz, you mustn't tease

TOBY Good Lord, is that teasing ? It's what everyone said

LIZ How did you photograph yourself ?

TOBY Oh, those scenes a pal of mine took

LIZ Well, I congratulate you It all sounds very interesting

TOBY I'm rather pleased myself

LIZ I thought people who made your kind of films despised Hollywood and all its works ?

TOBY (*with a smile*) One says one despises a lot of things There's plenty they can teach me that I want to know

LIZ And after that, you'll teach them

TOBY It would be nice to think so

MRS MILLWARD Are they going to pay you well ?

TOBY Handsomely, I think For a beginning, anyway

LIZ When do you go ? And for how long ?

TOBY I should think in a couple of weeks, for about three years

[*Enter ALEX*

She is in a very pretty evening dress She carries a cloak

ALEX Hello, Toby What's all this about ? Having secrets with Mother ?

MRS MILLWARD We *must* go upstairs, Liz

ALEX Yes Grandma's getting to the martyred stage I just looked in on her She said she *supposed* my dress was pretty !

LIZ Oh dear ! Well, I'll see you in the morning, then Have a good time (*To TOBY*) I'll be seeing you again, I expect

TOBY I hope so

LIZ Good night

TOBY Good night

[*Liz and MRS MILLWARD go out*

ALEX (*as they go*) Toby, what a mess you're in You do want a hair cut (*She straightens his tie and dusts his suit*) Now then

TOBY Where are you going ?

ALEX Party

TOBY Who with ?

ALEX Charles Hubbard If you've got something to tell me, you'd better hurry He'll be here in a minute

TOBY Can't you chuck him and come out with me ?

ALEX I'm afraid I can't

TOBY That s a new dress

ALEX I know Toby, don t be aggravating What is it ?

TOBY Well it's come

ALEX What has ?

TOBY A chance (*He smiles, and takes a letter out of his pocket*) Read that

ALEX What is it ?

TOBY It came this evening (*ALEX opens the letter and reads it* TOBY watches her with an equivocal smile)

ALEX (*thrilled by its contents*) Toby !

TOBY What do you think of it ?

ALEX (*aglow*) It s marvellous !

TOBY You're glad ?

ALEX I'm delighted for you (*She looks at the letter again, then refolds it, her face clouding a little*)

TOBY (*noticing it*) What s the matter ? Found a snag ?

ALEX For me Not for you

TOBY What ?

ALEX You re going away for three years

TOBY Do you mind that ?

ALEX Of course I mind

TOBY Well then, that brings me to what I was going to suggest

ALEX What ?

TOBY Your coming with me

ALFX Toby !

TOBY No, I mean it Will you ?

ALEX Are you serious ?

TOBY Of course I am We've always said we'd probably get married one day——

ALEX One day yes

TOBY Well, to day is the day , or rather sometime next week I think I can support you now, on this Don't you ?

ALEX Yes, I I suppose so

TOBY Well then Alex, won't you come ? You know I love you, don t you ? (*He puts his head against hers*) You ought to You and my work, you're the only things I do care about Alex us two together Hollywood I know it's a rotten place and they make lousy pictures, but it s something

ALEX It's marvellous

TOBY Well, all right, then It's pretty good, even if it is denying everything I ever said I ll admit it, I m excited But I want you there too You've seen me start from almost nothing Wouldn t it be rather good to do it all together right up to the top ?

ALEX Oh, Toby, you must give me time

TOBY Time ?

ALEX To get used to the idea When do you go ?

TOBY Hegerman sails in a couple of weeks I should think I'd go with him I m going to Paris in the morning to talk to him We ll fix everything up then I ll be back in a couple of days just in time to get a few things together and then sail both of us I hope

ALEX (*with an uncomfortable laugh*) You've got it all planned out

TOBY Well

ALEX You didn't tell Mother you were going to ask me to come with you ?

TOBY Good Lord, no But you will, though won't you ?

ALEX I can't tell you like this Give me a day to think about it After all, Toby, I've got *my* life and *my* career

TOBY Oh, well, all right We'll make a film-star of *you*

ALEX Likely

TOBY You can be Alexandra Millward, the new "It" girl It sounds better than Alexandra Chegwiddden, I think

[ALEX *laughs, but not with much conviction*]

ALEX No, don't be funny You know I'd have no chance in the films except as an extra If I'd made a success on the stage already

TOBY Well, just how important is the career to you?

ALEX It is important I know it mayn't seem like that to you, the way you've worked for yours I'm nowhere near where you are, nor ever likely to be I know that But I *am* getting my foot in Charles thinks there might be something in his father's new play for me Not the lead, of course, but a real part

TOBY So that's why you're running around with him

ALEX Well, partly Do you think that's mercenary? You've got to do it in the theatre

TOBY Have you? It's something I couldn't do toady to someone for a job go to parties for one I've got this on my own, and on my work That's how one *should* get there

ALEX It's all very well for you

TOBY (*with dawning realisation*) Alex, don't you want to marry me? Don't you love me? (*More urgently*) Don't you?

ALEX (*a little stricken by his face, with a sudden rush of quite genuine feeling*) Yes, Toby, I do, I do (*She kisses him suddenly and forcefully As they separate—with even more conviction from their contact*) I do

[*The front-door bell rings*]

There is Charles

TOBY Won't you put him off and come out with me ?

ALEX (*appealingly*) I can't really I can't
Oh, Toby, don't be angry with me Look Go
to Paris in the morning see Hegerman
and when you come back we'll talk again I'll
have had time to think then Please (*She takes
his face in her hands and kisses him quickly*)

[*ROSE enters*]

ROSE Mr Hubbard

[*Enter CHARLES HUBBARD*]

*He is a well dressed, suave young man of thirty
He wears tails*

ALEX Oh, hello

CHARLES Have I kept you waiting ? The fog's
pretty bad

ALEX It's all right Charles, this is Mr Cheg
widden Mr Hubbard

CHARLES How do you do ? Is yours the Baby
Austin outside ? I'm afraid I grazed it coming
in I didn't do it any harm, though

TOBY Is yours a Bentley ?

CHARLES Yes

TOBY (*turning away*) Yes

ALEX Charles, would you like a drink ?

CHARLES No, thanks We ought to go

[*Enter MRS MILLWARD*]

ALEX Oh, Mother, this is Charles Hubbard
My mother

MRS MILLWARD How do you do ?

CHARLES How do you do ?

MRS MILLWARD You've come to take Alex out ?

CHARLES Yes Had a bit of a time getting here
I think we ought to leave It's slow going to-
night

MRS MILLWARD Where is your party ?

CHARLES Ciro's My governor's giving it

MRS MILLWARD Oh, a theatrical one ?

CHARLES I expect there'll be a few tame stars
The old man still gets a kick out of them (*With a smile*) He started playwriting late in life

MRS MILLWARD I've enjoyed his plays

CHARLES He does, himself

TOBY (*with a bitter, chatty suavity*) It must be
such fun to meet them all Will Gloria Swanson
be there ? She's so lovely I think her films are
so don't you ? You might get her autograph
for me, Alex

ALEX Shut up, Toby

CHARLES (*to ALEX, with a smile*) What's the
matter with him ?

ALEX He's going to Hollywood

CHARLES Poor blighter

TOBY Have you been there ?

CHARLES Yes, I was there about two years ago

TOBY Staying at Pickfair ?

CHARLES (*lightly*) Yes Are you going to act ?

TOBY Me ? I'm only a poor mechanic

ALEX We must go Good night, Mother
Good night, Toby (*She gives him her hand A long
look passes between them as they shake hands*) What
time do you go to morrow ?

TOBY Nine o'clock

ALEX Ring up before you start

TOBY Won't you be sleeping late ?

ALEX I'll get up to say good-bye

TOBY Good-bye ?

ALEX Well *au revoir*, or *bon voyage*, or some
thing

CHARLES What's sailing to-morrow ?

ALEX Toby's going to Paris

CHARLES Oh Good bye, Mrs Millward

MRS MILLWARD Good bye Be careful, won't you ?

CHARLES Rather (*To TOBY*) Good night
(*TOBY does not answer*)

[CHARLES and ALEX go

MRS MILLWARD Had you a chance to tell her ?

TOBY Well, just

MRS MILLWARD What did she say ?

TOBY (*airily*) She was delighted

MRS MILLWARD She ll miss you

TOBY I wonder

MRS MILLWARD I m sure she will Three years is a long time

TOBY Yes Well, I must go too Good night
(*He shakes hands*)

MRS MILLWARD Good night And my congratulations

[*As TOBY goes to the door, it opens and ROLAND comes in*

ROLAND Oh, hello

TOBY Hello Good night

[*TOBY goes out*

ROLAND (*as the door shuts*) Manners, manners, manners ! Really, the young people of to day
(*MRS MILLWARD smiles*) Everything all right, Mother ? Liz seems in very high spirits

MRS MILLWARD Yes By the way, did you notice anyone special at Victoria , anyone with her, I mean ?

ROLAND Oh, there was a sort of baby beaver who seemed to be hovering a bit, called her Elise, and said '*à tantôt*' Why ?

MRS MILLWARD I just wondered She told me she'd come over with a friend What was he like ?

ROLAND Bloody awful, I thought Well, I'll say good night, Mother When does Aunt Nellie arrive, by the way ?

MRS MILLWARD To morrow, or the next day She's bringing Christine

ROLAND Oh, the polypus ! Charming child So communicative All she wants is sandbagging

MRS MILLWARD I'm putting them in the spare room and Liz in Alex's

ROLAND " House Full " boards up for the next few days How frightful

MRS MILLWARD (*smiling*) You haven't a lot of family feeling, have you, Roland ?

[*Enter LIZ She overhears the remark*

ROLAND I shall have a good deal less before the week's out

LIZ That's a nice thing to say

ROLAND (*turning*) My regard for you, Liz, isn't family feeling It's passion within the prohibited degrees Good night

[*ROLAND goes out*

LIZ Mother's been very difficult about Gillie not coming with me (*She settles down into a chair*) I ought to ring up Marcel and say good night (*Wriggling back in her chair*) But not just yet It's lovely being here, Evie

MRS MILLWARD It's lovely having you (*She sits on the arm of LIZ's chair and puts her arm round LIZ's shoulders*)

LIZ It's a nice house There's something complete about it something fulfilled I don't know what the life you've led in it, I suppose just as you're a sort of complete person (*With a smile*) What is it about you ?

MRS MILLWARD I haven't an idea (*She smiles too, and they remain sitting together*)

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE I

SCENE *The same Six o'clock in the afternoon
Three days later*

When the curtain rises, the stage is empty Then the door opens very gently and ALEX peeps in She wears a hat and coat

ALEX (*turning back to talk to CHARLES HUBBARD outside*) It's all right Coast's clear Leave your hat and coat and come in

[She comes in herself, leaving the door open behind her She carries a telegram in her hand She goes over to the fireplace and rings the bell Then she opens the telegram and reads it, frowning a little as she does so

CHARLES HUBBARD *comes in*

CHARLES It all seems very peaceful

ALEX The lull before the storm You don't know Grandma's birthday

CHARLES It seems to cause a lot of fuss

ALEX Fuss is Grandma's middle name There has to be a special birthday dinner every year Oyster patties, asparagus, creamed sweetbreads, and roast pheasant

CHARLES The old lady likes her food ?

ALEX (*very solemnly*) We end with Christmas pudding and brandy butter

CHARLES Atta, Grandma

[Enter ROSE

ROSE You rang, Miss Alex ?

ALEX Yes (*Confidentially*) Rose, who's here, and where are they all ?

ROSE I think they've nearly all gone, miss The mistress is in the drawing room Mrs Venables went up to dress Oh, and Mr Cheg widden's telephoned two or three times He

seemed surprised you weren't in, miss He asked had you had his telegram I said you hadn't I told him you'd be back to dress about six He said he'd probably come round

ALEX Thank you, Rose You might bring us some cocktails

ROSE Very good, miss (*She goes out*)

CHARLES (*looking at his watch in some surprise*) What time do you dine in this household? Do people go and dress at a quarter to six?

ALEX Grandma's birthday Dinner at seven sharp for the theatre at eight fifteen

CHARLES Can she get through that menu in an hour?

ALEX Just She takes peppermints in a silver box for during the play

CHARLES Wind?

ALEX (*nodding*) Wind

CHARLES You know, this seems very unlike you, all this family stuff I always pictured you as a bachelor girl

ALEX I wanted you to You know, if one's got a home and a mother and a grandmother, it's apt to put men off a bit

CHARLES I know It's a dread of having to marry the girl (*Seriously*) No, I know what you mean

ALEX I felt it the other evening when Mother told you to be careful driving me in the fog (*CHARLES nods*)

CHARLES I thought your mother was charming How long has she been a widow?

ALEX Five years

CHARLES Did you like your father?

ALEX (*nodding*) I was a bit afraid of him Why is one frightened of good people? Father was terribly good I used to think God must be

like him Mother adored him You know, she ought to marry again , but I don't believe she ever will

CHARLES Why not ?

ALEX Well, in the first place, she doesn't know anybody except widows (CHARLES *laughs*) We've a barrister cousin who I've always thought has a crush on Mother, but she won't look at him, except in the way of kindness And, anyway, I think Mother is a one man woman

CHARLES It's the best kind, really

ALEX Cheapest in the end ?

[ROSE *returns with cocktail shaker and two glasses on a tray She puts them on the drink table and retires*

ALEX Oh, thank you, Rose (*She goes over to the table*) Martini, I expect Is that all right ?

CHARLES Sure (*He stands by her, watching her closely while she pours out the cocktails*) What made you decide to let me into the family circle after all ?

ALEX It was getting difficult not to Here (*She hands the glass to him*)

CHARLES Thanks (*He holds up his glass*) To you Alex dear

ALEX Thank you (*She sips her own*)

CHARLES (*putting down his glass*) You've got something on your mind to day, haven't you ?

ALEX No

CHARLES A little bored with me, then ? I've noticed it all the afternoon

ALEX (*remorsefully*) Oh Well, there is some thing

CHARLES Would you like to tell me about it ?

ALEX There's nothing I should hate more

CHARLES You do shut me out, don't you ?

ALEX I don't mean to But I'm not in the habit

of getting violently confidential with people I've only known a week or two

CHARLES Do you really think time's got anything to do with it ?

ALEX Oh, Charles, please don't bother me now I'll be as Russian and involved as you like some other time, but not to day To night's going to be so awful ! Eight women and two men going to the theatre

CHARLES Have you hired a charabanc ?

ALEX I forgot

CHARLES Let me arrange it for you next time I've got a pull with the Hare and Tortoise bus line

ALEX (*looking at him*) You've got quite a lot of pull one way and another, haven't you ?

CHARLES I'm trying to use some of it for you right now

ALEX How ?

CHARLES With the governor His new play I'm dining at home to night specially on your account, to have it read to me, and tell him how good I think you'd be in it

ALEX Will he listen to you ?

CHARLES I can do a lot with the governor

ALEX It's terribly good of you

CHARLES I'm like that

ALEX I appreciate it

CHARLES Then, do you feel like giving me a kiss on account ?

ALEX On account of what ?

CHARLES Well, let's say, of the day when you won't shut me out quite so much

ALEX (*genuinely*) Oh, I'm sorry (*She puts her hand on his arm*)

CHARLES Do you know that I'm fond of you, Alex ?

ALEX You've no idea how little I care for myself

CHARLES Now you *are* being Russian !

[Enter LIZ and NELLIE NELLIE (MRS FLETCHER) is about forty plump, with the after-effects of prettiness and a strenuous life as a wife and mother

LIZ Oh, hello

ALEX Oh, LIZ oh, hello, Aunt Nellie May I introduce Mr Hubbard ? My aunts, Mrs Frobisher and Mrs Fletcher

CHARLES How do you do ?

LIZ How do you do ?

NELLIE How do you do ?

LIZ (*seeing the cocktails*) Oh, give me one of those !

ALEX I'll ring for another glass

LIZ No, give me some in yours I need it, quickly

ALEX (*refilling her glass*) What about you, Aunt Nellie ?

NELLIE I don't think I will, thanks I'll have the cherry, if there is one

ALEX I'm afraid there isn't

LIZ (*drinking*) Oh, what an afternoon !

ALEX Who's been to tea ?

LIZ Three old trouts who were at school with Grandma And a friend of mine from Belgium He's just gone at last And dear, dear Cousin Theresa She's changing here She's been going on at Evie all the afternoon about social reform

NELLIE And at me about bringing up children As if I didn't know more about that, with four

of my own, than she does with all her clinics and crèches Really, the older she gets, the worse Theresa becomes One of these days I'm going to be really rude to her (*Then, in some embarrassment, to CHARLES*) Oh, I'm so sorry going on like this It can't interest you

CHARLES It interests me very much

NELLIE Where have you been all the afternoon, Alex ?

ALEX We went to the Dog Show I never stopped falling in love (*To Liz*) Was Grandma cross that I was out ?

LIZ (*briefly*) Yes, dear

CHARLES I ought to push off

ALEX Another cocktail ?

CHARLES I don't think so, thanks I'll say good bye, Mrs Fletcher Good bye, Mrs Frobisher (*To ALEX*) I'll let you know how I get on to night

ALEX To night ? Oh, about me (*Lightly*) I'm not building on it

CHARLES I think you've a pretty good chance I've been paving the way

ALEX I'll see you out

[ALEX and CHARLES go out

NELLIE Who is that ? Do you know ?

LIZ I think he's Seton Hubbard's son

NELLIE No ? Oh, I wish I'd known !

LIZ Why ?

NELLIE I'd have had a better look at him I acted in one of his father's plays two Christmases ago, when the College Staff did it for the Infirmary

LIZ Your life is one continual round of gaiety, isn't it, Nellie ?

NELLIE (*blushing*) I suppose it does seem dull and provincial to you (*Then, a shade defiantly*) It does to me, too Especially when I come up like this and find you and Evie gadding about the way you do

LIZ Evie ? Gadding about ? I don't know how she stands her life Pottering with the house shopping, bridge, matinees She never goes out in the evening

NELLIE Well, I suppose she's no one to go with

LIZ I'm not used to sitting at home Last night here was agony

NELLIE Well, it all seems very luxurious to *me* And Alex the good time *she* has Do you think it's wise of Evie to allow her all the liberty she does ?

LIZ Why not ?

NELLIE Oh, I know it's the modern way But it wasn't like that with us Still, I suppose Evie knows she can trust Alex

LIZ Don't be so silly What's there to trust her about ? Alex is a very sweet girl, with her head screwed on the right way And, if she does have more freedom than we did, that seems to me all to the good

NELLIE I only hope she doesn't abuse it, that's all (*Liz makes a contemptuous noise*) Latchkeys, and going on the stage

LIZ Nellie, living in Newcastle has given you a nasty mind You'd better give up your amateur theatricals

NELLIE Don't be so silly, Liz Well, I'll go up and dress, and see that Christine's all right I hope there's nothing in the play to night she won't understand

[*She goes out*]

Liz pours herself out the remainder of the cocktail in the shaker, drinks it, looks at herself in the mirror of her bag, touches up her face. She goes over to the mantelpiece, where she finds ALEX's telegram lying unfolded. She reads it.

ALEX returns

LIZ A personable young man

ALEX I suppose he is

LIZ (*handing her the telegram*) By the way, this is yours. I found it here.

ALEX (*taking it*) Oh, thanks.

LIZ So Toby's due back this afternoon. Glad?

ALEX I'm worried. (*Pause. Then suddenly*) He wants me to marry him and go to Hollywood.

LIZ Does he? Are you going?

ALEX I don't know. (*Pause*) Liz, do you think things like success and money and position are very important?

LIZ What do you mean?

ALEX Well, this Hollywood job is a marvellous chance, but it's only a beginning. I know it would be an adventure, but ought one to risk things?

LIZ Are you in love with him?

ALEX (*after a pause, sits on the club fender*) We've lived together.

LIZ (*sharply*) What's that?

ALEX I said we'd lived together.

LIZ Alex!

ALEX Are you shocked?

LIZ Of course I'm shocked. Do you know what you're saying?

ALEX (*a little frightened now*) Yes

LIZ What do you suppose your mother would say if she knew ? She'd never get over it

ALEX Well, there's no reason why she *should* know, unless you tell her

LIZ God forbid And don't you, either He wants to marry you, you say ? But now *you're* not sure Is that it ?

ALEX Yes

LIZ What made you do it ? You weren't unhappy at home ? It isn't as if you were alone in the world What possessed you ? It's fantastic that a girl brought up as you have been——

ALEX Oh (*Pause*) I'm sorry I m sorrv I told you I thought I could tell *you*

LIZ Why me ? Because of Gillie ? (*With a laugh that is not too friendly*) Ha ! As one fast woman to another ?

ALEX (*protesting*) No But——

LIZ (*contemptuously*) Really ! Don't you see that was entirely different ? I wasn't a child like you, protected and unmarried I d been married I got married because I wouldn't do the very thing you've done Afterwards well, I was unhappy My marriage was a failure But you ? What excuse had you ?

ALEX I didn't think I needed any Does one, nowadays ? Everyone has affairs

LIZ Not girls like you

ALEX I think so Aren't you taking it all a little seriously ? Do you think I ought to marry Toby *because* of that ?

LIZ Your mother would think so

ALEX (*with a slightly twisted smile*) I've even been old fashioned enough to wonder myself

LIZ Then you're taking it seriously, too

ALEX I think it's silly of me to do so I hoped you'd tell me it was

LIZ Oh, did you ? Well, I'm not going to

ALEX If I told you I thought I could marry Charles Hubbard, what would you say then ?

LIZ Is that true ?

ALEX I think so

LIZ (*after a pause*) Well then, I'd say, if you like him at all, you'd be extremely silly not to

ALEX (*bitterly*) Even after the crime you seem to think I've committed ?

LIZ Don't be childish I think you've been a fool and worse But if you've a chance to obliterate it, and you're not sure about Toby

I gather Mr Hubbard's very prominent I'm always seeing his photo in the *Sketch* and *Tatler*——

ALEX That sounds very hard and calculating

LIZ It's practical common sense

ALEX And I wanted you to tell me to marry Toby love and the world well lost I can tell myself the other thing

LIZ Now you're contradicting yourself You said just now——

ALEX I'm contradicting myself all day That's why I came to you Oh, damn

[*Enter ROSE*

ROSE Mr Chegwidden

[*Enter TOBY CHEGWIDDEN He looks more untidy than ever*

TOBY Hello (*To LIZ*) How do you do ?

LIZ How do you do ? (*She gives him a very long look*) I'm going to dress

[*LIZ goes out with a rigid back*

TOBY Rather a sudden exit, surely ? Or was she being tactful ? How are you ? (*He takes her by the shoulders*)

ALEX You still haven't had a hair cut (*Putting her hand on his face*) Why, Toby ! How hot you are You're not ill, or anything, are you ?

TOBY Ill ? No I've got a bit of a sore throat trying to get you on the phone But I've been rushing Got in at half past three I've been on the go ever since

ALEX Doing what ?

TOBY Packing, mostly

ALEX Already ? Why ?

TOBY (*after a pause*) Because I'm sailing on Saturday

ALEX What ?

TOBY (*nodding*) The day after to morrow The *Bremen* Boat train from Waterloo at eight thirty

ALEX Toby ! You said two weeks

TOBY I know, but Hegerman's been cabled for, starts a new picture Monday fortnight wants me with him Therefore I've got my passport

ALEX Toby !

TOBY I know It's a bit sudden But could you do it ?

ALEX Me ? You don't expect *me* to come on Saturday ?

TOBY (*a shade doubtfully*) Well, that *was* the idea

ALEX You must be mad

TOBY No Why ?

ALEX At two days' notice ?

TOBY *I'm* doing it

ALEX That's different

TOBY I don't see it

ALEX (*temporising*) If I came *out* to you later

TOBY I want you to come with me Alex darling, *darling*, isn't it just as easy to do it to-morrow as in six weeks' time, and so much more exciting ? You promised me my answer to-day

ALEX I know, but I was going to ask for a little more time and now you come and spring this on me

TOBY Then you're still not sure ? You said the other evening that you loved me Why ? Why did you say it ? Just to keep me going ?

ALEX No, it was true I do love you Oh, Toby, this has all been so queer Till the other evening I'd hardly seen you for two weeks

TOBY That wasn't my fault I'd been wanting you

ALEX Had you ?

TOBY Terribly More, these last days

ALEX (*distressed*) Oh, Toby

TOBY But I don't want to use that as a lever, now

ALEX What do you mean ?

TOBY Just that What is it ? Charles Hubbard after all ?

ALEX Not Charles himself

TOBY I see ! But what he stands for Comfortable success without any of the fun of having worked for it a sort of twilight sleep And then what ? Your future assured for ever and sheer sterility I thought you liked the battle of getting there

ALEX I'm afraid of it

TOBY (*growing suddenly weaker*) Then you're not the girl I took you for

ALEX (*helplessly*) I'm sorry I don't think I can

TOBY I've seen that side of you before I didn't think that was the real you I thought I had the real you But if that was just a flash in the pan and the other's what you really want (*He puts his hand to his head*) I say, I feel rather peculiar I must sit down for a minute

ALEX You're ill

TOBY (*sitting with his hand to his forehead*) Well, I'm a bit odd I've been doing too much Could I have a drink ?

ALEX (*rather frightened*) Of course (*She looks round at the cocktail shaker*) I'll ring for some brandy (*She rings the bell*)

TOBY (*relaxing*) I really do feel very strange (*He leans back with his head on a cushion*)

[*Enter MRS MILLWARD She is in evening dress*]

MRS MILLWARD Oh, hello, Toby I didn't know you were here

TOBY (*struggling to get up*) I just came round (*He does not manage to rise, however, and collapses back into his chair*)

MRS MILLWARD Is anything the matter ?

ALEX (*frightened*) I think Toby's ill, Mother

MRS MILLWARD (*going over to him*) Ill ? (*She puts her hand on his forehead*) You've got a temperature

TOBY Have I ?

MRS MILLWARD (*feeling his hands*) Your hands are like fire

[*Enter ROSE*]

ROSE You rang, madam ?

ALEX Oh, I did

MRS MILLWARD Yes (*Still feeling TOBY's hands*) Rose, ask Mr Roland to come down and bring a thermometer with him Tell him it's important

ROSE Very good, madam (*She goes out*)

MRS MILLWARD He'd better have a look at you

TOBY I ll be all right

MRS MILLWARD You're very far from all right now, by the feel of you

TOBY (*weakly*) I've got to be all right I'm sailing Saturday

MRS MILLWARD Oh, but if you re not well

TOBY (*limply*) I've got to It's all arranged I want Alex to come with me (*A long look passes between mother and daughter*)

MRS MILLWARD And what does Alex say ?

TOBY She doesn't want to

MRS MILLWARD (*stroking his head*) Oh Well, don't worry about that now

TOBY I've got to go, you know, whether she comes or not

MRS MILLWARD Of course

TOBY Dead or alive I've got to

[*Enter NELLIE She wears a very simple, but not unbecoming evening dress*

NELLIE (*as she comes in*) You do keep this house hot, Evie (*Sees TOBY*) Oh I didn't know

MRS MILLWARD It's all right This is Mr Chegwidden He's not feeling very well Don't get up, Toby This is my sister, Mrs Fletcher

TOBY (*with a weak salute*) Forgive the collapse

NELLIE What's the matter ?

MRS MILLWARD I should think it's 'flu
There's a lot about

[Enter ROLAND *He is half dressed, with a dressing-gown over his trousers and shirt*

ROLAND What's all this ? Who wants a thermometer ?

MRS MILLWARD Toby He's not well

ROLAND What's the trouble ? (*He looks at him*)
Yes You don't look too good (*Puts his hand on his head, touches his hands*) What do you feel like ?

TOBY Cats' meat, if you want to know

ROLAND (*while he shakes down the thermometer*)
Yes But how cats' meat ? Have you got a head ache ? Sore throat ? Got any pain anywhere ?

TOBY I just ache all over

ROLAND Hm Well, put this under your tongue
(*Puts the thermometer in his mouth and feels his pulse*)

NELLIE I always take the children under the arm

ROLAND Well, that's one place

NELLIE (*sitting in MRS VENABLES' chair*) What time is the next post, Evie ?

MRS MILLWARD Not until half past nine
Why ?

NELLIE I haven't heard from Arthur He promised to write and say how Tinkie's cold was

MRS MILLWARD Would you like to telephone ?

NELLIE All the way to Newcastle ? Arthur would think I was mad (*To ROLAND*) You look very professional Roland, I must say

ROLAND Perhaps you'll believe me now when I tell you that Christine ought to have her adenoids out

[Enter MISS VENABLES (THERESA)]

She is an energetic, solid, dumpy woman of about fifty. She wears a very sensible, unbecoming evening-dress

MRS MILLWARD Oh, come in, Theresa

THERESA Hello, Alex ! How are you ?

ALEX Hello, Cousin Theresa

THERESA What's the matter here ?

MRS MILLWARD That's what we're wondering

ROLAND It's 'flu

NELLIE Oh dear ! I hope Christine doesn't catch it

THERESA Has she been near him ?

NELLIE (*grudgingly*) No But——

THERESA Well then children don't catch things if they are healthy, unless you rub their noses in them

NELLIE Christine's not strong

THERESA Only because you coddle her. She would be if you fed her properly and left her alone. Letting her gobble all those chocolates this afternoon when you know what a dinner you've got ahead of you !

NELLIE I suppose you've got a nice special lettuce leaf ordered for *you*

MRS MILLWARD (*with a smile*) Can you two never meet without squabbling ?

THERESA (*also smiling*) Sorry, Evie. My bossing nature !

NELLIE Well, keep it for your committees and the poor though God knows I'm one of *them*

ROLAND Now then (*taking the thermometer from TOBY and looking at it*) Hm (*gravely*)

ALEX What is it ?

TOBY Have I got a temperature ?

ROLAND Hm up a bit (*He passes the thermometer to MRS MILLWARD, who looks at it and raises her eyebrows*)

TOBY How much?

ROLAND Quite enough You're going to bed

TOBY I can't go to bed

ROLAND Sorry, old chap, but you'll have to
MRS MILLWARD Roland's quite right Have you anyone to look after you in your rooms?

TOBY I'm afraid not

MRS MILLWARD Then you'll have to stay here

TOBY (*weakly*) I would like to lie down

MRS MILLWARD We'd better put him in your room, Roland Do you mind?

ROLAND No, that's all right (*MRS MILLWARD rings the bell*) I'll sleep in the study

[*Enter MRS VENABLES in full evening dress, with all her jewels and a black ostrich feather fan*]

MRS VENABLES What's going on here? (*She sees TOBY*) What's the matter with him? Roland practising on him? (*She goes over to her chair*) Do you mind, Nellie? That's my chair

NELLIE (*rising*) Oh, of course, Mother I'm sorry

MRS VENABLES (*sitting down and going through her bag*) Alex, aren't you going to dress this evening?

[*Enter ROSE*]

MRS MILLWARD Rose, Mr Chegwiddden's not well He's got influenza Tell Webb to make up Mr Roland's bed for him and put in a hot-water bottle You can put the camp-bed in the study for Mr Roland later (*Handing her the thermometer*) Take that and wash it and put it back, will you?

THERESA You'd better stand it in Lysol

[*Exit ROSE*]

TOBY I'm sorry to be such a nuisance

MRS MILLWARD You're not a nuisance
Oughtn't someone to stay with him this evening while we're at the theatre ?

TOBY I'll be all right when I get to bed

MRS VENABLES Of course he will

ROLAND The maids can look after him He just wants keeping warm I'll give him something to get him sweating

MRS VENABLES Well, you'd better hurry up and do it *You've got to finish dressing* And what about you, Alex ? We shan't wait for you

ALEX (*after hesitation*) Oh, all right, Grandma

ROLAND Come along, old chap

[ALEX goes out

Can you stand on your pins ?

TOBY Of course (*He tries to get up and wobbles shakily on his feet*) Gosh ! (*He steadies himself*)

ROLAND Hang on to me

MRS MILLWARD I'll come up and see you when you're in bed

TOBY (*as they go out*) Silly of me I'm sorry

[ROLAND pilots him to the door ROLAND and TOBY go out

MRS VENABLES (*before the door has shut*) I've never seen such a commotion in all my life What's a bit of a temperature ? And who's Mr Chinkumpoop, anyway, to make such a fuss over ?

MRS MILLWARD Mother, the poor boy's ill

THERESA Who is he ?

MRS MILLWARD A friend of Alex's

MRS VENABLES Is she going to marry him ?

MRS MILLWARD I really don't know, Mother

MRS VENABLES Apparently you hope she is, the way you're fussing over him

THERESA (*with an astonished laugh*) What an extraordinary thing to say !

MRS VENABLES Why ?

NELLIE I wondered the same thing, myself

THERESA Perhaps it is I who am extraordinary
But, then, I don't look on marriage as the one
object of a woman's life as you and Evie seem to

NELLIE What do you think her object should
be ? Her career ?

THERESA Well, some larger horizon, I should
say, than mere personal relationships Just
loving someone hardly seems to me a full time
job

MRS VENABLES (*cutting across the discussion*)
Who was that Belgian man of Liz's this after-
noon ? Do you know, Evie ?

MRS MILLWARD Just a friend of hers, I think,
Mother

MRS VENABLES Very odd of her inviting him
on *my* birthday !

THERESA (*with a laugh*) Are you wondering if
Liz is going to marry *him* ?

NELLIE (*a little nettled*) Theresa, really !

[Enter ROSE

MRS VENABLES Oh, this will be that brother
of yours, Theresa

ROSE Mr Venables

[Enter CHRISTOPHER VENABLES

He is a man of fifty tall, good looking, distinguished He carries a very large, round box, obviously chocolates, and a florists box of the size of a large corsage spray

CHRISTOPHER It is that brother of hers I'm
not late, am I ? How are you, Eve ? (*He shakes
hands with her*) Many happy returns, Aunt
Lucy I hope you'll be seventy five a great
many more times

MRS VENABLES Is that my present ?

CHRISTOPHER It is (*He gives her the chocolate box*) How are you, Nellie ? Hello, Tess (*He pats THERESA on the shoulder*) Here's a button hole for you, Eve

MRS MILLWARD Oh, Christopher, how sweet of you You shouldn't (*She starts to open it*)

MRS VENABLES Don't be silly, Evie You know you expect it

MRS MILLWARD Well, I

CHRISTOPHER I hope she does I certainly regard it as my privilege

[*Enter MISS SPICER She carries a little silver box*

SPICER You forgot your sweeties, dear (*She goes over to MRS VENABLES*) Oh, more presents ? Shall I open it for you ?

MRS VENABLES I'm not quite decrepit (*She opens it herself*)

MRS MILLWARD (*taking out a very large spray of flowers*) Oh, Christopher, these are beautiful beautiful Thank you so much (*She starts to pin them on*)

[*Enter LIZ in full evening dress*

LIZ Hello, Christopher You're looking very distinguished I always feel you ought to be wearing a decoration

CHRISTOPHER I don't know what I've done to deserve it

LIZ I should think *this* night's work would earn it for you

CHRISTOPHER You're not looking so undistinguished, yourself

MRS VENABLES (*to LIZ, looking at her dress*) Is that what they call smart nowadays ?

LIZ I hope so, Mother

SPICER Chockys ! Aren't you a lucky girl ?

CHRISTOPHER (*to MRS VENABLES*) You're not to eat them all at once

SPICER Shall I put them away for you?

MRS VENABLES I'll keep them here (*She puts them on the table beside her*)

MRS MILLWARD I shall want another pin for these

SPICER I believe I've a wee safety in my bag I always keep some for emergencies (*She hunts*)

MRS VENABLES What emergencies?

LIZ Those are lovely, Evie I can't wear flowers They die on me

SPICER (*brightly*) Flowers fade on flirts!

LIZ (*surveying the room like a grandfather*) Well, here we all are! Eve, do you remember when we were children, coming down to breakfast in the morning?

MRS MILLWARD (*rising, taking Liz's hand and singing to the tune of "Home to Our Mountains"*)
Good morning, Grandmama

LIZ (*also singing*) Good morning, Grandpapa

NELLIE (*rising, taking Liz's other hand and joining in*) Good morning, Uncle Joe

ALL THREE (*curtseying and singing*) Good morning, all!

SPICER (*clapping*) How sweet

MRS VENABLES Ridiculous

[*The telephone rings* NELLIE answers it]

NELLIE Hello? Yes, this is Primrose 7708
Who? Oh, Evie I'll hold on (*To MRS MILLWARD*) Lichfield

MRS MILLWARD Lichfield? (*She goes to the telephone*)

SPICER Isn't there a cathedral there?

LIZ Gillie's father is one of the Canons (*She puts her hand to her mouth, suddenly struck by an idea, and she and MRS MILLWARD exchange glances*)

SPICER (*searching in bag*) I know there's a pin here I expect if it was a bear it would bite me

MRS MILLWARD (*at phone*) Hello ? Yes ? Yes Mrs Millward speaking Who is that ? Oh, hello Yes, she's here I'll just see Hold on (*She puts down receiver*) LIZ Gillie For you

MRS VENABLES What's that ? Gillie ? (*I goes to the telephone*) I thought you'd left him down south

LIZ (*into telephone*) Hello ? Gillie ? What are you doing in England ? Your father ? When ? But, Gillie (*She glances round MRS VENABLES' eye is on her, also MRS MILLWARD'S*) What do you want ? No, I can't I'm engaged for lunch I don't know (*Aware of the strain*) Gillie, I can't talk to you now I can't Yes, well ring up in the morning Yes, I will Good bye (*She rings off*)

MRS VENABLES Well ? What's it all about ?

LIZ His father's dead He came over for the funeral

MRS VENABLES It must have been very sudden He was barely eighty

LIZ It was Gillie sent you his love, Mother wished you many happy returns

MRS VENABLES When is he coming to London ?

LIZ To morrow

[*The gong goes*

MRS VENABLES (*instantly*) Dinner ! (*She claps her hands*) Come along It's my party and I'm not going to wait for anyone (*She rises*) Stop fidgeting with your bag, Spicer You never can find

anything in it Come along, Liz Come along,
Theresa Come along, Nellie (*Then, as she goes*)
Oh dear, I wish we had a few more men in the
family !

[MRS VENABLES *goes out, followed by Liz,
NELLIE, THERESA and MISS SPICER, in solemn,
single file Then MISS SPICER runs back*

SPICER (*triumphantly*) Here it is I knew I'd got
one I'm afraid it's very tiny (*She gives the pin
to MRS MILLWARD, and trots out again*)

[MRS MILLWARD *stands pinning on her flowers*
CHRISTOPHER *remains behind with her*

CHRISTOPHER You're looking tired, Eve

MRS MILLWARD I've had a lot to do

CHRISTOPHER You look worried, too Are you ?

MRS MILLWARD A little

CHRISTOPHER What about ?

MRS MILLWARD Oh Alex and Liz
and oh, it's nothing, really (*With a light
laugh*) We've got a young man upstairs in bed
with 'flu

CHRISTOPHER You're pretty wonderful, Eve

MRS MILLWARD (*with a smile*) Why ?

CHRISTOPHER The way you deal with things
You're so unselfish

MRS MILLWARD Theresa wouldn't say so

CHRISTOPHER Has Tess been daring to criticise
you ?

MRS MILLWARD Oh, no She's only been say-
ing one shouldn't be bounded by personal
relationships

CHRISTOPHER What rubbish

MRS MILLWARD Well, her kind are the ones who *do* things My trouble is that I've never wanted to I've been happy to be bounded

CHRISTOPHER Don't you ever want to run away ?

MRS MILLWARD (*moving towards the door*)
Where to ?

CHRISTOPHER Somewhere where you'd be the important one for a change ?

MRS MILLWARD (*stopping, then after a tiny pause*)
No Do you know, I don't, really ?

[*The gong goes again, loudly*
(*She smiles*) Mother !

[*They go out*

CURTAIN

SCENE II

SCENE MRS MILLWARD'S bedroom, about twelve o'clock the same night

The door to the landing is in the back wall, slightly to the right

Down stage L is a door to the dressing room

The fireplace is in the centre of the back wall below it an armchair and a small table with books

Windows down stage R, with the dressing-table below them

In the corner of the L and back wall is an alcove in which the bed is placed, slanting down into the middle of the room

Above it a night table and below it a writing-desk with telephone

At the foot of the bed a couch

The room is charming, intimate and cosy

When the curtain rises, the stage is empty The fire, an electric one, is burning The bed table lamp and a lamp on the dressing-table are lighted The door on to the landing is open and the family (off) are heard saying good night

MRS MILLWARD (off) Well, good night, Mother dear Have you enjoyed your day ?

MRS VENABLES (off) Yes It's been very nice, thank you, Evie

MRS MILLWARD (off) Good night, Miss Spicer
Good night, Christine *

SPICER (off) Good night, Mrs Millward dear
Good night, Alex Good night, Roland Good night, Christine

ALEX (off) Good night Miss Spicer Good night, Grandma Good night, Liz Good night, Aunt Nellie

MRS VENABLES (off) Come into my room, Liz I want to talk to you Good night, Nellie

MRS MILLWARD (off) Come and talk to me Nellie

NELLIE (off) I'll just go up with Christine and leave my things

[MRS MILLWARD comes in with ROLAND and ALEX

ROLAND (waving to MRS VENABLES as he comes in) Good night, Grandma Now you'll be good for another year, won't you ?

MRS MILLWARD (to ROLAND) Did you see if the telephone was switched up here ?

ROLAND I did

ALEX Roland, Toby is all right ?

ROLAND Oh, yes He's all right

MRS MILLWARD He's sleeping very restlessly (She goes into the dressing room)

ALEX I thought he looked dreadful He'll never be able to sail on Saturday, will he ?

ROLAND I wouldn't advise it, but you never know Get his temperature down and he can

ALEX Illness frightens me

ROLAND Well, I'll go to my improvised bed You're sleeping in there, aren't you? (*Points to the dressing-room*) How we do get pushed about

MRS MILLWARD (*entering from the dressing room with her spray of flowers in a glass of water*) You were a very good boy to night, Roland Every thing went beautifully Thank you, dear

ROLAND It was a bit of a strain I missed about half the show, picking up things for Grandma

MRS MILLWARD Well, *she* enjoyed herself

ROLAND She *has* got a bawdy laugh

MRS MILLWARD (*smiling*) Darling ' Well, good night

ROLAND Good night, Mother (*He kisses her lightly and, to ALEX*) Good night, Push-Face

ALEX (*distracted*) Good night

[ROLAND goes

MRS MILLWARD (*taking off her shoes*) Roland can be a great help when he puts himself to it

ALEX (*vaguely*) Yes

MRS MILLWARD I can't say I'm sorry to day's out of the way

ALEX I'll go and get undressed and finish with the bathroom

MRS MILLWARD All right, dear Come in and say good night

[ALEX goes into the dressing room

Enter NELLIE, from the landing

NELLIE (*plumping into the armchair*) Well, that's over You must be tired, Evie

MRS MILLWARD (*going to the dressing table*) I am (*She starts to take off her jewels and puts them away*)

NELLIE Although you can't really have much to do This house runs itself

MRS MILLWARD I wish it did

NELLIE I do envy you having reliable maids I can't keep mine six months You don't know how lucky you are, Evie, with all you've got What wouldn't I give to have everything nice around me like you have (*She picks up a book from the table*) What's this like?

MRS MILLWARD What?

NELLIE This book here It's only just out, isn't it? I never read a thing nowadays

MRS MILLWARD You used to be fond of reading (*She starts to take off her dress and put on a dressing gown*)

NELLIE I used to be fond of a lot of things that I either can't afford or haven't time for, now (*She puts down the book, takes up another and starts to prowl She inspects a photograph on the dressing table*) That was a good photo of Henry

MRS MILLWARD Yes, it's my favourite

NELLIE (*looking at the book she has in her hand*) Poetry? I didn't know anyone still read poetry Did you mark this?

MRS MILLWARD (*looking*) Yes

NELLIE Why?

MRS MILLWARD I think it's rather beautiful (*She sits at the dressing table, her back to NELLIE*)

NELLIE (*sitting on the couch after a pause, looking at the poem*) Yes it is nice (*She looks at it again, and after a pause begins to read from the book*)

“When you have tidied all things for the night,
And while your thoughts are fading to their
sleep,
You'll pause a moment in the late firelight,
Too sorrowful to weep

The large and gentle furniture has stood
In sympathetic silence all the day,
With that old kindness of domestic wood
Nevertheless the haunted room will say
Someone must be away "

Yes but *you* can't be lonely Evie, what's
the matter between Liz and Gillie ?

MRS MILLWARD I don't know Why ?

NELLIE Well, it's all rather strange, isn't it ?
Liz is marvellous, the way she keeps young and
smart Who'd believe she was five years older
than I ? It looks the other way round

MRS MILLWARD (*doing her face and hair at the
mirror*) Nonsense You look very pretty, Nellie

NELLIE Well, if I could spend the time and
money she does on massage and beauty pre-
parations though, anyway, I don't know
what the use would be There's nobody to see
me in Newcastle (*Suddenly*) Oh, Evie, I'm so
tired of it all I feel it's all running away from
me

MRS MILLWARD (*crossing to her*) What is ?

NELLIE My life Like water Soon I'll be old
and have had nothing Oh, I know you think
I'm a grumbler I am I'm turning into one
I hear myself doing it, and can't stop You don't
realise, Evie, what it does to you never to have
quite enough of anything You don't know how
fortunate you are

MRS MILLWARD And yet I'd change places
with you to-morrow

NELLIE Me ? What have I got ?

MRS MILLWARD You've got your husband

NELLIE I sometimes wonder if I wouldn't have
been better off without one Look at Theresa
She's free, and the things she does interest *her*,

though they wouldn't me But she can do what she likes and go where she likes I'm tied hand and foot

MRS MILLWARD You love Arthur, don't you ?

NELLIE I suppose I do But is that so important ?

MRS MILLWARD I think it's almost everything

NELLIE Love ?

MRS MILLWARD What it means to you Look at the marriages where it doesn't exist , Father and Mother, for example

NELLIE What do you mean ? That wasn't an unhappy marriage

MRS MILLWARD It wasn't a marriage at all When Father died, all that Mother missed was her position as the spoiled head of the household Afterwards, when her investments went wrong and she'd only her own money to fall back on, I can't tell you how shocked I was at her anger against poor Father (*She checks herself*) Mother's never really been able to care for anyone except herself

NELLIE I'm not sure that it isn't the way to be happiest in the long run

MRS MILLWARD Happy ? When your whole world's disorganised if one tiny comfort is denied you ?

NELLIE (*reflectively*) I suppose you're right It doesn't do to be selfish , I just wish that I had a chance of being, sometimes, that's all

[*Enter Liz*]

LIZ I don't know how we've all put up with Mother all these years Why don't we pop her into a boarding house ? She'd be much happier there She'd have so much more to grumble at Can I smoke a peaceful cigarette in here ? (*She takes one from a box*) Nellie ? (*Offers her one*)

NELLIE No, thanks I'm going to bed Good night, Liz Good night, Evie

LIZ Don't run away

NELLIE I must Evie that jumper suit of yours Can I take it to try on ?

MRS MILLWARD It needs a stitch I'll send Rose up with it in the morning Why don't you take a good rest and have breakfast in bed ?

NELLIE I m so used to getting up at eight I doubt if I could sleep Besides, Christine will be awake Good night, Liz How nice your hair looks Good night, Evie

MRS MILLWARD Good night, Nellie dear (*She gets up and kisses her*)

[*Exit NELLIE*

MRS MILLWARD What's Mother been saying to you ?

LIZ Oh, she's been so difficult I had practically to jump over the furniture to evade her

MRS MILLWARD About Gillie ?

LIZ Yes, and Marcel What did you think of Marcel, Evie ?

MRS MILLWARD He's rather a dear

LIZ I suppose he is Yes, he is

MRS MILLWARD Did you tell Mother about him ?

LIZ I just managed not to

MRS MILLWARD And what about Gillie ?

LIZ What about him ?

MRS MILLWARD His telephoning was rather a surprise

LIZ It was He wants to see me

MRS MILLWARD Oh You won't, will you ?

LIZ Do you think I oughtn't ?

MRS MILLWARD Don't *you* ?

LIZ I suppose I oughtn't I don't see why I shouldn't, though

MRS MILLWARD Would it be quite fair to Marcel ?

LIZ He needn't know

MRS MILLWARD Liz really !

LIZ I'm lunching with Marcel to morrow I thought if I saw Gillie later

MRS MILLWARD Have you any idea what he wants ?

LIZ Not the remotest

MRS MILLWARD You don't suppose he wants you back ?

LIZ I've no idea

MRS MILLWARD You wouldn't *go* back, would you ?

LIZ Good God, no But I think I *ought* to see him

MRS MILLWARD Now *why* ?

LIZ (*a little doubtfully*) Well, I want to see he's all right

MRS MILLWARD That's not your responsibility any more

LIZ No, I know, and yet in a way I feel it will always be my responsibility There are times when Gillie's like my child

MRS MILLWARD You do still want to marry Marcel, I suppose ?

LIZ (*turning and looking at her*) Want to ? (*She shrugs*) I know it's the sensible thing to do The trouble is I've never done anything sensible in my life, and I can't get used to the sensation But I will get used to it I've got to get used to it

MRS MILLWARD You're not still in love with Gillie, are you ?

LIZ Really, Evie, you do ask the most inconvenient questions That's got absolutely nothing to do with it I'm not weakening, if that's what you mean I know perfectly well what Gillie is, but, after all, we did end rather violently, and I'd like to have one last dispassionate look at him and *know* how right I am And if he *wants* to see me well there's no reason why we should part bad friends

MRS MILLWARD You're quite sure you're not just enjoying playing with fire ?

LIZ I'm only sure of two things I want to see Gillie once more and I'm going to marry Marcel Let me ask Gillie here to tea, and then you can chaperon us, if you're doubtful about the proprieties

[Enter ALEX in pyjamas and dressing gown]

ALEX Oh, I didn't know that you were here

LIZ I must go to bed I shall probably lie awake for hours, but one's got to begin some time Good night, Evie (*She kisses her*) You've been very unhelpful

MRS MILLWARD What did you want me to say ?

LIZ I wanted you to give me a clip on the ear (*She goes*)

ALEX Well, I'll say good night too, Mother

MRS MILLWARD Don't you want to stay and talk ?

ALEX Talk ?

MRS MILLWARD Yes

ALEX What about ?

MRS MILLWARD About yourself Hasn't Toby asked you to marry him ?

ALEX Yes

MRS MILLWARD And you've refused him ?

ALEX Not yet

MRS MILLWARD But you re going to ?

ALEX (*flopping suddenly on to the couch*) I don't know what to do

MRS MILLWARD Wouldn't you like to talk about it ?

ALEX There's nothing to say (*Passionately*) I'd like to pack up and go away and begin all over again

MRS MILLWARD Isn't that a little drastic ?

ALEX I simply don't know what I want, or what I believe in

MRS MILLWARD That sounds bad

ALEX It is bad Oh, Mother, I wish you could help me I know you can't

MRS MILLWARD Why not ?

ALEX (*over forcibly*) I *loathe* myself

MRS MILLWARD (*the phrase going home to her*) Alex is there something you haven't told me ?
(ALEX *nods*) Will you tell me ?

ALEX I can't

MRS MILLWARD Why not ?

ALEX I don't want to hurt you

MRS MILLWARD (*beside her*) Tell me

ALEX (*with an effort*) Well Toby and I
No, I can't

MRS MILLWARD You've been lovers ? (ALEX *nods*) I see

ALEX (*sobbing*) Oh, Mother, I'm so sorry

MRS MILLWARD (*quietly*) Why are you sorry ?

ALEX (*amazed*) Don't you mind ?

MRS MILLWARD I want to understand Why did you ? (ALEX *makes a gesture of "I don't know"*) You loved him ?

ALEX I think so

MRS MILLWARD Then

ALEX He was sweet, and there was opportunity We were together all the time There seemed no need to look ahead It didn't seem wrong, then

MRS MILLWARD Does it now ?

ALEX Telling you it does

MRS MILLWARD Even if you love him or you *did* ?

ALEX Now that I've got to decide, suddenly and for ever I don't know That's why I wish we *hadn't* now It seems so big a thing

MRS MILLWARD Well, isn't it ?

ALEX It didn't seem so then (MRS MILLWARD *motes away from her*) You're angry with me ?

MRS MILLWARD If you mean that

ALEX (*faintly mocking, to protect herself*) You'd have forgiven a grand passion ?

MRS MILLWARD (*a shade sharply*) You needn't put it like that

ALEX (*contrite*) I'm sorry I didn't want to dramatise myself and say (*over dramatically*) ' Do I love him enough to *give* myself to him ? ' It seemed making too much of it I suppose that's what you can't forgive

MRS MILLWARD Perhaps it is I can't see why you'd balk at saying that and not at saying " Do I love him enough to marry him ? "

ALEX You think I *ought* to marry him ?

MRS MILLWARD Not if you don't want to really want to My point is only that you seem to be questioning now, for the first time, how much you care for him I think you might have thought of it before

ALEX Well, marriage means my whole life I feel there's so much now I might be missing

MRS MILLWARD Such as ?

ALEX A good time here success perhaps my own life My job

MRS MILLWARD What is your life but *his* life, if you love him ? Besides, your marriage *is* your job

ALEX And supposing it fails ?

MRS MILLWARD (*countering her*) Supposing your job fails ? (*Pause*) Are you flirting with the idea of Charles ?

ALEX A little I have been for what he could give me Toby knows that He despises me for it

MRS MILLWARD I think he's right to despise you for it You don't love Charles You begin to make me doubt if you even know what love means Have you no capacity for caring for anything at all except yourself ?

ALEX I do care for Toby

MRS MILLWARD But not enough to make your life his life ?

ALEX I might as well say he doesn't love me enough to make his life mine Why not ?

MRS MILLWARD Because that's not the way things are , because you're a woman

ALEX What's that got to do with it ?

MRS MILLWARD Everything unless you're of the kind that lives impersonally, like Theresa, and then I think you're unfulfilled I think that's what being a woman means

ALEX To submerge yourself, and everything you stand for, in a man ? To give up everything for him ?

MRS MILLWARD It isn't giving up It's an exchange for something so much more enriching than anything you could have alone It's not a sacrifice It's a fulfilment

ALEX And if he dies, what then ?

MRS MILLWARD (*very quietly, after a pause*) Then your life's over

ALEX (*with a quick, impatient laugh of contemptuous protest*) Oh, really !

MRS MILLWARD To all intents and purposes (*Melting a little*) Darling, I know what I'm talking about

ALEX Is *your* life over ?

MRS MILLWARD The best of it Father *was* my life I couldn't have asked a better

ALEX But but your life's full You're interested in things You read You're fond of music You like to travel You've us Roland and me

MRS MILLWARD Do you need me, really ? You're grown up You're ambitious I hope you'll marry if not Toby, then someone else Does Roland need me ? He shouldn't any more No Life for me I think for most women means more than that It means existing in someone else—for someone else

ALEX If you believe that, then you must believe in *suttee*

MRS MILLWARD No, you can't do that You have to live your life out

ALEX Why, if it's over ?

MRS MILLWARD Because I think there's another kind of life that comes from inside you after your own life's done

ALEX After your married life, you mean ?

MRS MILLWARD After your own personal life
It comes from what you've made of it, almost
like a reflection of it Without it, you wouldn't
be complete Can you understand that ?

ALEX Yes if you've the capacity (*She
begins to cry*) Oh, Mother (*She puts her arms
round MRS MILLWARD, crying*)

[*The door opens, and TOBY appears He is in
pyjamas, towseled, feverish and delirious ALEX sees
him first*

ALEX Toby ! What are you doing here ?

TOBY I was too hot

MRS MILLWARD You mustn't get up like this

TOBY I was too hot

MRS MILLWARD Yes, but you've got to keep
warm You must go back to bed

TOBY I can't It's too hot

MRS MILLWARD You must have something
round you Alex, go and get Roland's dressing
gown

ALEX (*frightened*) Mother is he—— ?

MRS MILLWARD He's all right Do as I tell
you

[*Exit ALEX*

TOBY I've got to get that boat

MRS MILLWARD Boat ?

TOBY The *Bremen* She's sailing I mustn't miss
her

MRS MILLWARD She isn't sailing to day

TOBY Isn't she ? What is to day ?

MRS MILLWARD Thursday

TOBY Are you sure ? I thought that was last
week She hasn't sailed already ?

MRS MILLWARD No No, of course not

TOBY You don't mind my being here ?

MRS MILLWARD No , only, you must go back quite soon

TOBY It's too hot I think it's my hair

MRS MILLWARD Your hair ?

TOBY Yes, there's too much of it Alex said so It's too hot Would you cut it off for me ?

MRS MILLWARD It's all right, Toby

TOBY It's not all right It's much too long She said so I wish you'd cut it off Give me the scissors (*He tries to rise*)

MRS MILLWARD (*soothing him*) It's all right I'll do it You sit still (*She goes over to the dressing-table, gets a pair of nail-scissors, comes back and pretends to cut round his hair for him*) There Look It's all gone It's on the floor, see Better now ?

TOBY (*putting his hand up to his head*) Yes Lots better now Alex was quite right It did need it Thank you

[*ALEX comes back with a dressing gown*]

MRS MILLWARD (*taking it from her*) Good Now, Toby, put this on

TOBY I don't want to It's too hot

MRS MILLWARD It's not hot It's a nice, cool dressing gown , ever so cool You see how cool it makes you (*She puts it on for him*)

TOBY Yes, you're right It is cool

MRS MILLWARD Won't you come back to bed now ? I've had that made cool for you, too

TOBY Have you ? You won't let me miss the boat though ?

MRS MILLWARD It'll wait for you

TOBY No, they don't wait They never wait

MRS MILLWARD This one will They just rang up to say so

TOBY Did they? Oh, well, that's all right, then Alex mustn't miss it, either (*To MRS MILLWARD*) She's coming, you know I think she wants to bring a party I believe I told her she wasn't to, only (*turning to ALEX*) you tell her she can She can bring anyone as long as she comes We can get rid of them later There'll be lots of stops Only, she's got to come Tell her for me, will you?

ALEX (*in a whisper*) I'll tell her

TOBY (*to MRS MILLWARD*) You'll keep that other chap out, won't you? I don't want *him* You know, Alex is awfully sweet, really She's silly sometimes, but that's when she's young It's the *Tatler* that does it (*Suddenly growing angry*) And I don't know why she wants to bother with all that lace It's a damn fool thing to have around a studio, anyway She's got to get rid of it

MRS MILLWARD It's all gone It's thrown away

TOBY Is it? Oh, I'm glad Did you make her? (*He becomes suddenly maudlin*) You know, you're being awfully sweet to me I do like you

[*He collapses suddenly, his knees giving way completely MRS MILLWARD stops him from falling, holding him against her for a moment*

ALEX gives a little cry MRS MILLWARD frowns at her to control herself, and helps TOBY straighten up

MRS MILLWARD Come back to bed now (*At the door she turns and says over her shoulder to ALEX, in a low, decisive tone*) Ring up Mackenzie at once Tell him to come round We'd better have a nurse Tell him what's happened

[*She goes out with TOBY*

ALEX stands scared, wide eyed, motionless for a minute Then she moves towards the telephone Before she reaches it, it rings She answers it almost mechanically

ALEX Hello ? Yes Who is that ? Oh Charles No No, I hadn't gone to bed It's only the telephone rings in Mother's room at night No, she's not here What is it ? What's all right ? The play ? Oh Oh, yes Yes, of course Read it to him ? To morrow ? Yes, I suppose I could Don't I ? Oh, I'm sorry Charles Of course I'm delighted Only things are a bit difficult here Do you mind if I ring off now ? Yes Yes, all right To morrow morning Half past ten I'll be there Good bye, Charles (*She puts down the receiver and sits quite dazed and helpless*)

[MRS MILLWARD comes back

MRS MILLWARD I woke Roland He's with him Is Mackenzie coming ?

ALEX (*dazed*) I haven't called him

MRS MILLWARD Why not ?

ALEX (*as before*) Charles Hubbard rang up

MRS MILLWARD Alex, what's the matter with you ? I'll ring up Mackenzie

[*She goes to the telephone, begins to dial*

ALEX (*beginning to cry again*) Oh, Mother, he he Mother, it isn't dangerous, is it ? I've never seen anyone like that before He didn't know who I was

MRS MILLWARD Alex, pull yourself together (*ALEX goes on crying*) He's all right He'll be all right Hello ? Is that Doctor Mackenzie ? This is Mrs Millward Millward Yes Doctor, could you come round here ? It's a friend of ours He's running a temperature with influenza He's just got up and had a slight collapse Yes Thank you Thank you, Doctor As soon as you can (*She hangs up*) He's coming (*She moves towards the door*)

ALEX Mother, he's not going to die, is he ?

MRS MILLWARD Of course he's not going to die Don't be so silly

ALEX What shall I do ? Oh, what shall I do ?

MRS MILLWARD Control yourself, or, if you can't, then go to bed I've had just about as much as I can stand to day

ALEX I'm sorry I'll try I'll be good (*She pulls herself together*)

MRS MILLWARD (*patting her*) That's right

[*MRS MILLWARD moves towards the door, and then looks back at ALEX*

MRS MILLWARD All right now ? (*ALEX nods*)
I'll go down and boil a kettle

[*MRS MILLWARD goes out*

ALEX *sits alone, bewildered and helpless, trying not to cry*

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE I

SCENE *The sitting room, the following afternoon (Saturday), about three forty-five*

When the curtain rises, ROLAND is discovered fast asleep in an armchair, with his feet up on another chair. A medical book is open in his lap

The door opens and MISS SPICER comes in

SPICER Oh (ROLAND opens his eyes) Did I wake you? I'm so sorry

ROLAND What's the time?

SPICER A quarter to four. I've just been out for a blow. I went right over Primrose Hill.

ROLAND I say! (*He takes his feet down*)

SPICER I found such a strange little old lady sitting up there. Do you know, she told me that I was the first person she had spoken to for a whole week. She lives all by herself in one wee room, with just a cat for company. Isn't it dreadful to think of the lives some people have?

ROLAND (*uninterested*) Hm. Dreadful.

SPICER You know, I often think we don't realise how much we've got to be thankful for. I must go and wake Mrs. Venables. (*She goes to the door*) I suppose you're going back to sleep.

ROLAND I shouldn't wonder.

[*Enter THERESA. She wears outdoor clothes*]

THERESA (*coming in briskly*) Hello, Roland. Rose told me I should find you here. Good afternoon, Miss Spicer. Apparently everyone else is out.

SPICER Oh? Isn't Alex back yet? You don't know if she got that part she went to read this morning?

ROLAND She hasn't been home.

THERESA I just came in to bring some books I promised to lend your mother I'm on my way to the clinic in Camden Town Have you been working ?

ROLAND Sleeping like the babe unborn

THERESA And I walked here all the way from Gloucester Road (*To SPICER*) How are you and Aunt Lucy to-day, Miss Spicer ?

SPICER Oh, Mrs Venables is very lively

THERESA And you ?

SPICER I'm always all right

THERESA Have you had good news of your mother lately ?

[ROLAND *sits up with his mouth open*

SPICER Oh, yes Of course she's very frail, but my step sister writes that she's weathering the winter wonderfully Well, I must go up

[MISS SPICER *goes out*

ROLAND (*incredulously*) Do you mean to tell me *she's* got a mother ? The old thing must be a centenarian

THERESA Do you realise that Spicer's not so much older than your own mother ?

ROLAND Good God I've always thought of her as being about seventy, ever since I can remember, and Mother as about forty Funny how people stay the same age in one's head

THERESA How old am I ?

ROLAND Never you mind

THERESA How's your patient to-day ?

ROLAND Toby ? Well he went up to over a hundred and three in the night, but we've got his temperature right down now He's getting up for tea

THERESA Getting up ?

ROLAND He's sailing for America in the morning insists on it Mackenzie said it would do him more harm to stay here fretting than to let him go So we thought he'd better get up for a bit to prepare for it Mother and Webb are round at his flat packing up for him

THERESA That's very good of your mother

ROLAND (*with some surprise*) Yes, I suppose it is

THERESA You children take her too much for granted

ROLAND Is that why you're always trying to persuade her to take up good works with you because you think she's unappreciated in the home ?

THERESA I think it might be a good idea for her to cultivate some interests outside it Your mother's a young woman, comparatively, and what has she got in her life ?

ROLAND (*a shade irritated*) What have you got ?

THERESA A great deal of interest and activity , the kind that need never come to an end until I do

ROLAND A kind of insurance against a lonely old age ?

THERESA If you like But don't you, as a prospective doctor, recognise a social sense ?

ROLAND Not in the very least, I'm afraid I took up medicine because Father and Mother wanted me to And it seemed as good a job as any other

THERESA If that's true you ought to be ashamed of yourself

ROLAND I gave up being ashamed of myself years ago

THERESA Well, I'd better go up and see Aunt Lucy for a minute She'll expect it if she hears I've been

[THERESA goes out

ROLAND *stretches, re arranges himself in a chair, putting his feet up again and making another attempt to settle down to sleep*

The door opens and Liz comes in She wears very smart clothes and hat

LIZ Hello, Lazybones

ROLAND Yes, I know It's a disgrace Where have *you* walked from ?

LIZ I haven't walked from anywhere

ROLAND Thank God Spicer and Theresa have been making me feel most uncomfortable

LIZ How ?

ROLAND Oh, Spicer telling me what a lot we've got to be thankful for in this life, as if *she'd* anything, poor old haddock , our contraceptive cousin's been trying to awaken a social conscience in me There aren't any robins outside, are there ? I feel I might start by throwing out crumbs

LIZ You are a fool, Roland

ROLAND You know, Theresa even told me how much more she got out of life than Mother Well, all I can say is, "Thank God, Mother doesn't try " Theresa's so bloody up and doing What she wants is a good, strong he man Was there ever a man in her life, by the way ?

LIZ She was half engaged to a schoolmaster who was killed in the war

ROLAND Oh ! So, then, that's why she's turned to work as an anodyne

LIZ No She's always been that type She wasn't meant for men And yet, do you know, she was very pretty as a young girl ?

ROLAND Isn't it curious ! Every girl of her generation was, as far as I can make out

LIZ I wasn't I'm much better looking now than I've ever been Your mother and Nellie were the beauties I was the ugly duckling

ROLAND And yet you've had all the men

LIZ (*offended*) Well, really ! (*Relenting*) I've only had two

ROLAND Yes It's funny how chequered your career has seemed, and how mild it's been in reality

LIZ It's not been at all mild !

ROLAND There's no pleasing you

LIZ I do wish your mother *could* get more out of life though Can't you do anything to stir her up ?

ROLAND Stir Mother up ! What do you suggest I do ? Take her pillion riding down to Maidenhead ? Grandma might come too I'll bring a boy friend from the hospital for her

Oh, don't be silly, Liz Mother's very sensible Life can't be much fun, anyway, for women of fifty But at least they can sit back and accept it gracefully as she does, instead of——

LIZ (*interrupting him furiously*) You're disgusting Callous and revolting

ROLAND (*surprised*) I'm sorry

LIZ Even if it's true, it's horrible for you to say it, especially about your own mother I'm in no mood to have things like that said to me I wanted to be at my most calm and detached and dispassionate

ROLAND Whatever for ?

LIZ Never mind what for I wanted to (*Holding up her arm and showing a diamond wrist watch*) Do you think that's pretty, Roland ?

ROLAND Is that new ? (*Liz nods*) You've been splashing a bit, haven't you ?

LIZ You don't suppose I bought it myself ?

ROLAND Aunt Liz, I'm shocked at you Remember, men never give anything for nothing

LIZ That's all you know

ROLAND Well, I hope it keeps time for you

LIZ Roland, I don't like your tone You're much too familiar with your aunt

ROLAND My aunt's very pleased with herself about something Where have you been lunching ?

LIZ At the Ritz (*She looks at her watch*) What is the right time ?

ROLAND Five past four

LIZ Well, perhaps you wouldn't mind if I asked you to occupy one of the other rooms in this house for a little while I'm expecting someone

ROLAND (*amused*) Oh ? Oh, well, I'll go and get my patient out of bed

[*ROSE opens the door*]

ROSE Mr Gilbert Baize, madam

[*Enter GILBERT BAIZE*]

He is a man of forty eight, attractive in a slightly "Rasta" way

GILBERT (*passing ROLAND as he comes in*) Why, if it isn't little Roland My ! But you have growed !

ROLAND Hello, Gillie

GILBERT Hello, Liz You look very stunning (*He approaches her She dodges backwards*)

ROLAND (*brightly*) Well, I'll leave you

[*ROLAND goes out*]

GILBERT Nice of him Now, Liz

LIZ Now, Gillie

GILBERT Why wouldn't you lunch with me ?

LIZ I told you I was otherwise engaged

GILBERT With the Brave Petit Belge ? Oh, Liz, you're not going to try and keep that up, are you ?

LIZ Gillie darling, I don't want to be unpleasant, but I would like to point out something that I don't think you've realised

GILBERT What's that ?

LIZ That I've left you

GILBERT (*serious for a moment*) I've no intention of realising that Oh, Liz, don't be a fool (*He tries to put his arm round her*)

LIZ Gillie, will you please leave me alone ?

GILBERT Liz, listen I'm sorry I know I was filthy to you I apologise I was tight

LIZ That's hardly a new excuse

GILBERT Are you going to begin again ?

LIZ Have you anything else to say ?

GILBERT Quite a lot But let's get friendly first

LIZ I'm perfectly friendly

GILBERT Well, then, give me a kiss

LIZ No, I'm damned if I will If you've any thing to say, say it (*Pause Then chattily*) I was sorry to hear your father was dead Did you see him ?

GILBERT Yes We had quite a chat

LIZ Did he forgive you ?

GILBERT He was inclined to forgive I told him we were washed up, you and I, I mean

LIZ And that pleased him, of course

GILBERT Well, you know how he felt about those things As a matter of fact, I rather gave him to understand without actually saying so that it was I who had left you (*Liz gasps*) I thought you wouldn't mind It comes to the

same thing in the end, and if it eased his last hours — well, you *don't* mind, do you ?

LIZ I mind a very great deal

GILBERT Oh, I'm sorry I don't know what I can do about it now

LIZ What did he say ?

GILBERT He said he was very glad I'd seen the light, or words to that effect, and wouldn't I consider going back to May if she'd forgive me May was there, by the way

LIZ And you said ?

GILBERT I said of course I d consider it May said she'd consider forgiving me You've no idea the amount of consideration we worked up The old boy went out wreathed in smiles

LIZ (*very amused*) Gillie, you are more of a dis grace—— (*Then, pulling herself together*) And that s how you left it ?

GILBERT Yes

LIZ (*not quite liking it*) Well, it's all very satisfactory, isn't it ? When do you and May set up house together ?

GILBERT (*with an eye on her*) I should think, about the same time as you and Marcel (*A pause He walks away from her, turning his back Then he speaks with a deliberate airy unconcern*) As a matter of fact, May s consenting to divorce me

LIZ (*startled out of all her flippancy*) What's that ? After ten years ? Why ?

GILBERT Well I can make it worth her while now

LIZ Oh ? Have you come into money ?

GILBERT Quite a bit We'd a long chat over the funeral baked meats Am I a bit yellow about the eyes, by the way ?

LIZ Yes You drank too much sherry It never agreed with you

GILBERT Well, anyway, we arranged terms for a settlement She's filing her petition right away

LIZ (*a shade alarmed*) Am I to be co-respondent ?

GILBERT No, I even got her to consent to spare you that

LIZ That was very nice of you

GILBERT I told her it would make *her* look an awful bitch So I should say that in something under a year, if you feel like it, you can be an honest woman again

LIZ Are you proposing to me ?

GILBERT I suppose you might call it that

LIZ You re not serious ?

GILBERT I was never more serious in my life

LIZ (*almost squeaking in disbelief*) You mean you want me to marry you ?

GILBERT I've always wanted you to marry me when I haven't wanted you to go and drown yourself

LIZ That's a nice thing to say, too

GILBERT I *am* serious, LIZ

LIZ Yes, well I happen to be engaged to someone else

GILBERT In a pig's eye !

LIZ (*angry*) How dare you ?

GILBERT LIZ, you can't marry Marcel any more than I can go back to May We belong to each other, don't we ? Don't we ?

LIZ (*fighting with herself*) Not any longer

GILBERT Oh, well, then the divorce is off I'm certainly not going to pay all that money and take some frightful woman to a Railway Station Hotel if you won't marry me afterwards

LIZ I'm sorry

GILBERT (*turning away from her, genuinely distressed*) I thought it was marriage you were set on And when this happened it all seemed so easy Are you *fond* of this Belgian ?

LIZ (*beginning to be torn*) He's been very good to me

GILBERT Couldn't *I* be good to you ?

LIZ You've *not* been

GILBERT (*approaching her, but with a good deal less assurance and a little more pleading*) I would be Surely you know I'm fond of you, Liz ?

LIZ You've an odd way of showing it

GILBERT I've missed you like hell It's been beastly down South The villa's been frightful It's all been bloodstained without you (*Liz is a little touched*) Have you had fun ?

LIZ (*after a pause*) No I've had the most damnably boring time (*Gillie shows visible relief*) Oh, but it's only because I'm not used to it I intend to *get* used to it

GILBERT Why ?

LIZ Because I want to settle down

GILBERT Then settle down with me

LIZ Back in the villa ?

GILBERT Not if you don't want to Where would you like to settle ?

LIZ Paris ?

GILBERT All right

LIZ Gillie, you don't really mean it ?

GILBERT Of course I mean it (*He approaches her, puts a tentative arm round her*)

LIZ (*suddenly beginning to cry*) Oh, Gillie ! Why ?

GILBERT (*hugging her*) Why what ?

LIZ (*crying a lot*) Why everything ? Why do

you do the things you do behave as you used to, and then come and be nice to me ? You will be just as bad again in a week I know you will You don't think marriage is going to change you, do you ?

GILBERT It may have a sobering effect if you really want me changed, that is I don't want you changed, for all your tiresomeness You know, I've always thought how awful it would be to meet people in heaven that you were fond of on earth and find them all cleaned up, with none of the things that you liked left about them all your old drinking companions gone T T

LIZ (*laughing and crying*) Oh, Gillie, you are a fool

GILBERT It's true If you were sweet and gentle and uninteresting like Evie, do you think I'd still want you, even though she's got a far better character than you have ?

LIZ Why do you want me ?

GILBERT Because you make me laugh, and you smell nice

LIZ Oh, Gillie

[*The door opens and MRS MILLWARD is heard talking to ROSE in the hall*]

MRS MILLWARD (*to ROSE*) You'd better leave it all in the hall for the moment

LIZ (*whispering*) Don't tell Evie now Oh, my God What about Marcel ?

[*Enter MRS MILLWARD She wears outdoor clothes*]

MRS MILLWARD Oh, Gillie

GILBERT Hello, Evie (*He kisses her*)

MRS MILLWARD Have you been here long ?

GILBERT Not very

MRS MILLWARD I'm sorry I was out

GILBERT (*with a smile*) It was Liz I came to see

[Liz *sedulously avoids* MRS MILLWARD's eye]

MRS MILLWARD Are you staying for tea ?

GILBERT Well, I was just thinking I don't feel awfully like facing up to the mater, if you don't mind Will you dine with me this evening, Liz ?

LIZ I'm dining here

GILBERT Evie will spare you Won't you, Evie

MRS MILLWARD Do you want to go, Liz ?

LIZ Would you mind if I went ?

MRS MILLWARD Of course not, if you want

LIZ All right, then

GILBERT I'll say good bye, Evie You look a bit washed out

MRS MILLWARD I'm tired (*She sits down To Liz*) I've been packing Toby's things He's got the oddest flat There's nothing in it but a grand piano, piles of books, and a lot of drawings and travel posters stuck on the walls

LIZ Do you like that boy ?

MRS MILLWARD Yes, I do He's got a kind of courage and determination

[*Enter ROLAND, supporting TOBY TOBY is dressed in trousers, pyjama top and the jacket of his day suit from the previous act He walks unsteadily*]

ROLAND Here we are

MRS MILLWARD Oh, hello, Toby This is splendid Gilbert, this is Mr Chegwidden Mr Baize

GILBERT How do you do ?

TOBY How do you do ?

ROLAND Come and sit down (*To MRS MILLWARD*) He managed the stairs A! (*He puts TOBY into a chair by the fire*) How do you feel ?

TOBY A bit like blotting paper

ROLAND Well, take it easy

GILBERT So long, Evie I'll be seeing you Take care of yourself

MRS MILLWARD I'm all right, Gillie

GILBERT (*to LIZ, noticing her wrist watch*) You've got a new tick tick

LIZ Yes, it's it's on appro It will have to go back

[*Exit LIZ and GILLIE*]

MRS MILLWARD Your things are all in the hall, Toby I've arranged with Harrods to pack all the books and send them after you

TOBY Did you see the woman ?

MRS MILLWARD Yes, I settled everything

TOBY (*to ROLAND*) I really can sail to-morrow ? You're not just stringing me along ?

ROLAND Honest to God (*To MRS MILLWARD*) Mackenzie came again after you went out He's arranged for a nurse to take him to Southampton and put him on board She's coming up later Can I leave him with you for a minute, Mother ?

MRS MILLWARD Of course Has Rose lighted the fire in the drawing room ? I said we'd have tea in there so that Toby can be quiet here You might remind her, will you ?

ROLAND Right you are

[*ROLAND goes out*]

TOBY I can't thank you enough for all your trouble I'm afraid the flat was in an awful state What did you think of it ?

MRS MILLWARD It's an interesting flat

TOBY Oh dear, is it as bad as that ? As a matter of fact, it's never been much more than a workroom and a storehouse

MRS MILLWARD Have you never had a home ?

TOBY Not since I was about eighteen I don't

know that I've missed it, although being here has made me realise a lot of things

MRS MILLWARD For instance ?

TOBY Well differences between me and Alex
My life has been pretty well nothing but work,
and keeping going, with no sort of background
to it

MRS MILLWARD You've done marvellously
(*After a pause*) I can't imagine where Alex is

TOBY Roland said she went to read a part

MRS MILLWARD That was this morning

TOBY Well, I expect she went out to lunch, or
something

MRS MILLWARD She should have come back

TOBY (*just too off hand*) Oh, I don't know

MRS MILLWARD Has Alex hurt you ?

TOBY No, of course not Why ?

MRS MILLWARD I wondered

TOBY (*after a pause*) Did I say anything stupid
last night ?

MRS MILLWARD I don't think so

TOBY I seem to remember I said something
about her coming with me

MRS MILLWARD You said you wanted her to

TOBY Oh

MRS MILLWARD I gathered from her you'd
asked her to marry you

TOBY And she told you she wouldn't ?

MRS MILLWARD Not quite that

TOBY It comes to that

MRS MILLWARD Would you mind *terribly* if
she didn't ?

TOBY Yes, I'd mind, of course But I've sort of
been getting used to the idea to day You see
can I talk to you about it ?

MRS MILLWARD If it won't tire you

TOBY It won't I'd like to I've never talked to you before, and I feel now now that you've been so frightfully good to me that I've been going a bit behind your back

MRS MILLWARD I think I know more than you realise, Toby (TOBY *looks up at her searchingly*) Alex told me last night

TOBY (*looking away*) I'm sorry

MRS MILLWARD That I know?

TOBY Not quite that But I've suddenly realised that Alex is an awful lot younger than I thought I don't mean in age, but you see, I'd only known her, really, away from all this, and she puts on a sort of sophistication that rather took me in I knew, of course, that it wasn't all real, but what I do see is that perhaps I've tried to make her go my way I'm a bit headlong, and I think she got swept up I'd always felt I'd like to marry her, but until now I couldn't possibly keep her, and the idea was just ruled out, except as a possibility one day

MRS MILLWARD I see

TOBY I do want to marry her, but I feel I mustn't try and force her It wouldn't be any good unless it came, really spontaneously, from her, because, even with what I'm getting in Hollywood, it's not going to be too easy And, besides, that may not last I can wait if there's a chance I did try to force her just on the sort of excitement of it all But now I mustn't I know that (*With a smile*) That's what being here for twenty four hours and running a temperature has done for me

MRS MILLWARD I don't think it's only that Thank you for talking to me

TOBY I'm awfully glad I have She's lucky to have you

MRS MILLWARD Try and rest a little now

[Enter ALEX *She is in outdoor things*

MRS MILLWARD Oh, there you are, dear

ALEX Yes Toby, you're up ! How are you ?

TOBY I'm all right

ALEX Really ? Are they going to let you sail ?

TOBY Apparently

ALEX To morrow ?

TOBY Yes (*ALEX shows relief*) How did you get on ?

ALEX Get on ?

TOBY Your reading

ALEX (*rather restless and vaguely impatient*)
Reading ? Oh, yes, I forgot

TOBY How did it go ?

ALEX (*nervy*) Oh, all right, I think I can have the part if I want it What have you been doing, Mother ?

MRS MILLWARD Is anything the matter, Alex ?

ALEX I don't think so

MRS MILLWARD What have you been doing since ?

ALEX (*very distraite*) Oh, shopping

MRS MILLWARD Charles Hubbard rang up for you at lunch time He said would you ring him when you got in He's asked you and me to go with them to the first night at the St James s next Wednesday I thought it was very nice of him Can you go ?

ALEX I don't know I don't think I can

MRS MILLWARD Oh Well, if you'll stay with Toby for a little, I'll go and get ready for tea

ALEX Of course, Mother

[MRS MILLWARD *takes her hat and goes*

Thank God

TOBY What ?

ALEX That she's gone Toby I've got
a present for you

TOBY A parting gift ?

[ALEX *takes a large envelope from her bag and
hands it to him He looks at her*

ALEX Open it

TOBY (*taking out a passport and a steamship ticket*)

Alex !

ALEX My ticket and my passport I'm coming
with you (*She goes over and sits on his lap in the
armchair, putting her arms round his neck*) That's
what I've been doing all day That, and buying
a trunk and some things That's why I was
longing for Mother to go out of the room
I wanted to tell you alone

TOBY And the reading ? Was that all made
up ?

ALEX No I read the part I wanted to prove
I could before I chucked it

TOBY They really offered it to you ?

ALEX Yes God knows how I did it My mind
was miles away, with all I had to do, and the
terror of not being able to get it done And the
thought of walking in here like this (*They
kiss*)

[*Enter* MRS VENABLES, *followed by* Miss
SPICER

MRS VENABLES (*as she comes in*) Evie, what's
the idea of— (*She stops*) What's going on in
here ?

ALEX (*getting up*) Nothing, Grandma

MRS VENABLES I see (*Looking at TOBY's
clothes*) That's a peculiar costume And what's

the idea of having tea in the drawing room ?
It's like an ice house

TOBY I'm afraid that drawing room tea is
my fault They thought I ought to be quiet

MRS VENABLES (*with meaning*) Quiet ? Oh !

TOBY But I'm quite all right, really, if you'd
rather be in here Is this your chair I'm sitting
in ?

MRS VENABLES It always has been

TOBY Oh, well

ALEX You mustn't get up, Toby

SPICER (*to MRS VENABLES*) You'll be all right
sitting here, dear

MRS VENABLES (*grimly*) Of course, if *you* say
so Go and tell Rose to bring tea in here

ALEX Grandma, I m sure the drawing room's
all right

MRS VENABLES I don't like tea in the draw
ing-room

ALEX (*growing angry*) Well, apparently Mother
wants it there to day

MRS VENABLES If you re so anxious to be
alone with your young man, why don t you take
him into the drawing room and do you love
making there ? There's a sofa

SPICER Oh, Mrs Venables dear !

ALEX I'm sorry, Grandma, but Toby's going
to stay here and I'm going to stay with him

MRS VENABLES All right then So am I
(*She sits in the other armchair*)

ALEX Grandma, you're being deliberately
obstinate and annoying You re just making a
fuss because you can't have your own way

TOBY (*weakly*) Alex dear, don't for me

MRS VENABLES Well, things have come to a

pretty pass, I must say First you try to turn me out of my own sitting room——

[Enter MRS MILLWARD

Oh, there you are, Evie And about time, too

MRS MILLWARD What's the matter ?

ALEX I'm afraid I've been rude to Grandma

SPICER It wasn't anything really Alex didn't mean——

MRS VENABLES Alex didn't mean ! I come in here and find her carrying on with a half-dressed young man in my armchair——

ALEX You may be interested to hear that I'm going to marry the half dressed young man, Grandma

MRS VENABLES And so you ought, by the way you were behaving

MRS MILLWARD (*with a half-delighted surprise*) Alex !

ALEX I didn't mean to tell you like this, Mother, but it's true I'm going *with* Toby to California

MRS VENABLES What's that ?

ALEX Toby's going to America, Grandma And I'm going with him in the morning

SPICER (*thrilled*) Oh, Alex !

MRS VENABLES In the morning ? And when do you propose to get married ?

ALEX I really don't know, Grandma On the boat if we can or when we get there That doesn't seem to me very important

MRS VENABLES Oh, really Evie ! Are you going to stand there and listen to such wicked nonsense ?

MRS MILLWARD I don't know that I think it is nonsense, Mother

MRS VENABLES Well I do I never heard such

a thing in all my born days Have you gone stark, staring mad? Your own daughter tells you that she's going off to America with (*spluttering*) God knows what kind of a young man and it doesn't matter whether she gets married or not?

MRS MILLWARD She didn't mean that

MRS VENABLES I'm not so sure

TOBY (*feebly*) Please, please don't go on like this

MRS MILLWARD Mother, Alex is old enough to get married if she wants to, and I'm very glad she does You can't interfere You mustn't interfere

MRS VENABLES Oh, very well Now we know where we are Now my own daughter turns against me

ALEX Grandma, will you please stop making a scene

MRS VENABLES A scene! (*To MRS MILLWARD*) And you let her speak to me like that!

[During the last few speeches TOBY, unnoticed by the others, has struggled to his feet after a couple of unheard protests He is swaying, and clutches at the mantelpiece for support In doing so he knocks over an ornament, which calls attention to him]

ALEX Toby! (*She goes to him quickly Turning to the others*) Look what you're doing to him Mother, take Grandma away (*She supports him*) It's all right, Toby It's all right (*To the others*) Mother, for God's sake take her away Take her away!

CURTAIN

SCENE II

SCENE MRS MILLWARD's bedroom *It is seven o'clock the following morning*

As the curtain rises, ROSE enters with a tray of tea and bread and-butter, which she puts on the small table She draws the blinds and smooths and straightens the bed, which has been slept in

MRS MILLWARD *comes in She is very simply dressed in a sweater and skirt*

MRS MILLWARD Oh, good morning, Rose

ROSE Good morning, madam You're up very early

MRS MILLWARD I didn't sleep very much I've just been in to Mrs Venables

ROSE I brought you some tea, madam

MRS MILLWARD Oh, thank you, Rose Have you called Mr Roland ?

ROSE Oh, he's been up a long time, madam I heard him go into Mr Chegwiddden's room soon after six

MRS MILLWARD Oh, good He's going to the station with them

ROSE You'll be wanting your heavy coat, won't you, madam ? It's cold out so early

MRS MILLWARD I'm not going to the station, Rose

ROSE Aren't you, madam ?

MRS MILLWARD Miss Alex said she'd rather I didn't I think she's quite right

ROSE Well, I expect she'll have enough to do looking after Mr Chegwiddden Do you think he ought to go, madam, looking like he did last night ? It's a responsibility taking him all that way

MRS MILLWARD I think he'll be all right

[ALEX comes in from the dressing room, in travel
ling-clothes

ALEX Good morning, Rose

ROSE Good morning, miss Did you get some
sleep?

ALEX Yes Lovely A couple of hours Nobody
was more surprised than I was

[Exit ROSE

MRS MILLWARD How do you feel?

ALEX Fine Awfully calm, really but sort
of funny inside when I think about it (*With a
smile*) But awfully important too, as if I'd been
put in charge of something the War Office,
perhaps (*Pause*) Mother you don't
mind, do you? You've been so grand and
splendid But inside do you mind?

MRS MILLWARD I don't pretend I like your
going away from me But otherwise I'm very glad

ALEX You're responsible for it, you know,
making me take the plunge I told you that
last night

MRS MILLWARD (*putting her arm round her*)
Darling

ALEX It wasn't only what you said but
when I saw you *with* him putting him to
bed, treating him as if he were one of us, like
Roland and me, I mean, it it did something
to me

MRS MILLWARD (*gently*) You told me

ALEX I know I told it to myself all yesterday
when I was running around I kept re-living
that scene in here Do you know, in a funny
way I felt jealous of you? It was like seeing
someone else look after one's child, and know
ing that they'd a perfect right to because one
was so inadequate oneself That's when I knew
that nothing else counted (*With a change of
tone*) Now, let's have our tea (*She starts to pour*

out) I've written to Charles I know I've treated him rottenly, but I can't be sorry, really I did my best to *write* sorry (*Passing a cup*) Oh, let me know who gets my part, won't you ? It's the heroine's best friend, the one who gets *told* everything Have you seen Grandma this morning ?

MRS MILLWARD Yes

ALEX How is she ?

MRS MILLWARD Rather chastened

ALEX Shall I have to apologise to her again ?

MRS MILLWARD If she wants it It won't do you any harm

ALEX No Oh, Mother, poor you having to go on putting up with her

MRS MILLWARD I'll be all right

ALEX (*after a tiny pause*) Can I ask a very impertinent question ?

MRS MILLWARD (*with a smile*) What is it ?

ALEX Do you *love* Grandma at all ?

MRS MILLWARD Oh, darling, don't go away thinking of her like that She's old, she's always been spoiled Perhaps I have spoiled her, too, but in a way she depends on me, and that is always a little endearing I don't think *love* s ever entered into *her* scheme of things

ALEX Oh (*Then after a pause as though at a tiny revelation*) No

MRS MILLWARD You see, she's selfish, really That's why I've watched you so carefully some times, terrified of seeing that in *you* That's why I'm so glad about you now

ALEX (*impulsively*) Darling Mother I love Toby and I love you (*She kisses her*)

[*Enter Liz in a dressing-gown*]

LIZ Hello All ready ? (*She kisses ALEX*) Very excited ?

ALEX Funnily enough, I'm not I'll go up to Toby for a minute (*She goes out*)

LIZ Poor Evie How do you feel? Quite resigned?

MRS MILLWARD (*smiling*) I'm not in the least resigned I'm very pleased

LIZ I imagine you had quite a bit to do with it

MRS MILLWARD Not consciously

LIZ Oh (*She turns away, a little perplexed*)

MRS MILLWARD What do you mean?

LIZ Nothing (*She turns back Their eyes meet*)

MRS MILLWARD (*after a moment, quietly*) Do you know too?

LIZ You told her she ought to marry him?

MRS MILLWARD No

LIZ But ?

MRS MILLWARD We can't discuss that now,
LIZ

LIZ Do you think she'll be happy?

MRS MILLWARD I think she stands a very good chance of it

LIZ (*after a moment*) Evie can you bear another piece of news?

MRS MILLWARD I think so

LIZ I'm going back to Gillie It wasn't any use, really, the other thing I always knew I was kidding myself I believe you know it, too We had dinner last night in his suite at the Dorchester Then we sat and talked Gillie was rather adorable, like a naughty little boy He can always get round me, if he wants to, and (*looking down*) the park looks rather lovely from there in the moonlight

MRS MILLWARD (*deprecating—amused*) Oh, Liz!

LIZ Well, you believe in fidelity I'm faithful

to Gillie Oh, I forgot to tell you, we're going to be married

MRS MILLWARD Married? I thought it was his father who'd died

LIZ It was But May's going to divorce him on the proceeds and on grounds supplied Then we shall be married and respectable and the vicar will call or perhaps he won't (*Gesticulating*) "A brave man wedded her, after all, But the world said, frowning, 'We shall not call'" That'll be one comfort, anyway We're going *round* the world first!

MRS MILLWARD What?

LIZ After she's got her evidence, just while all the divorce stuff's on Then we'll probably get married in some outlandish place with a witch-doctor and a black priest or something

MRS MILLWARD You *have* fixed it all up

LIZ Ought we to have consulted you? The High Priestess

MRS MILLWARD Don't be naughty

LIZ I felt we ought

MRS MILLWARD How long will you be away?

LIZ A year

MRS MILLWARD Oh dear

LIZ (*impulsively*) Oh, Evie, I never thought of that First Alex and now me Oh, poor darling Come with us

MRS MILLWARD Do you think Gillie would like that?

LIZ I suppose you're right Why haven't you got a man of your own? Would you like to marry Marcel?

MRS MILLWARD Do you think he would have me?

LIZ I'm afraid he wouldn't He liked me because he thought I was dashing You'll just have to go and run a creche for Theresa Have you told her and Christopher about Alex, by the way ?

MRS MILLWARD I rang them up Christopher's coming in this morning to say good bye

[*Enter ALEX*

MRS MILLWARD (*to ALEX*) How is he ?

ALEX He seems all right Roland's dressed him

LIZ Isn't the nurse here ?

ALEX I countermanded her I'm taking Toby

LIZ Well, really You and your mother There seems to be no amount of trouble you don't enjoy I d have had a fleet of nurses

[*Enter MRS VENABLES followed by Miss SPICER MRS VENABLES is in a dressing gown Miss SPICER is dressed*

ALEX Oh, good morning, Grandma Good morning, Miss Spicer

SPICER All ready ? Are you very excited ?

ALEX Not really

MRS VENABLES So you *are* going, are you ?

ALEX It looks like it (*She gives a look at her mother and then goes over to MRS VENABLES*) Have you forgiven me, Grandma ?

MRS VENABLES I suppose I've got to, as it s probably the last time I'll ever set eyes on you

ALEX Oh, no, Grandma

MRS VENABLES Three years you said ? You don't expect me to be here when you come back, do you ? I suppose you'll be taking your mother away from me to come and visit you ? Though what Evie'll do in Hollywood I can't imagine

SPICER You'll have to go too and keep an eye on her

ALEX We'll get you off with Ronald Colman

MRS VENABLES I think Wallace Beery's more in my line Where's your young man ?

ALEX He's coming down

MRS MILLWARD There's breakfast downstairs, Miss Spicer, if you'd like some

SPICER Well, a cup of coffee would be nice I've been up a long time Do you mind if I go, dear ?

MRS VENABLES No, go along I'll stay up here

MRS MILLWARD LIZ ?

LIZ Yes, I'll go down See you later, Alex

[LIZ and MISS SPICER go out

MRS VENABLES (to ALEX) Aren't you having any breakfast ?

ALEX I'll have it on the train

[Enter ROSE

ROSE The car's at the front door, madam Webb's just gone with the big trunk in a taxi

MRS MILLWARD Oh, go and tell Mr Roland, then (To ALEX) What about your dressing-bag ?

ALEX I've only to close it Will you take it, Rose ? (She goes into the dressing room, followed by ROSE)

MRS VENABLES You're bearing up very well, Evie

MRS MILLWARD I'm very glad about it, Mother

MRS VENABLES A nice waste of money all that stage training of hers has turned out What's she done except say, " Here are those papers you asked for," every night for a year ?

[*Re enter ALEX, followed by ROSE, who carries a dressing bag ROSE goes out*]

ALEX (*overhearing*) Grandma, I also said, "I'm afraid Mr Thompson's busy Oh, no, here he is"

MRS VENABLES That of course is a career in itself Are we going to see you on the screen now?

ALEX I'll wink once in every picture and you'll know it's meant for you

[*Enter NELLIE*]

NELLIE Hello, Alex All ready? Very excited?

ALEX I suppose I must be by now

NELLIE I wonder when we'll see you again? Christopher has arrived, by the way, Evie

MRS VENABLES Tell him to come up and see me, somebody

[*Enter ROLAND and TOBY*]

ROLAND Behold the bridegroom cometh!

MRS MILLWARD How are you, Toby?

TOBY I'm doing as well as can be expected Good morning, Mrs Venables

MRS VENABLES Let's have a proper look at you now you're dressed H'm

TOBY Do you approve?

MRS VENABLES You want a hair cut

TOBY Oh, I know

MRS VENABLES Give you something to do on the boat (*with a grin*) when you're not being "quiet"

ROLAND We're ready, aren't we?

MRS MILLWARD I think so Let's go down

TOBY (*to Mrs MILLWARD*) I'll never be able to thank *you* enough You've been simply marvellous

MRS MILLWARD Well, take care of Alex And that will be enough

TOBY You know I will (*He kisses her*)

ALEX Good-bye, Grandma (*She kisses her*)

MRS VENABLES Don't go and get mixed up with any gangsters

ALEX I won't Good bye, Aunt Nellie or are you coming down?

NELLIE I think I'll stay here with Grandma Good bye, Alex dear (*They kiss NELLIE is a little tearful*)

ALEX Aunt Nellie, I'm being married, not buried

TOBY Good-bye, Mrs Venables (*He holds out his hand*)

MRS VENABLES You know, I don't believe I ought to shake hands with you Still I've got a forgiving nature Good bye (*She does*)

TOBY (*to NELLIE*) Good bye

NELLIE Good bye Mind you wrap up well

MRS MILLWARD Come along, darlings

[*She puts her arm round TOBY and ALEX and they go to the door and out ROLAND follows them*]

MRS VENABLES (*calling*) Oh, Alex

ALEX (*putting her head round the door*) What is it, Grandma?

MRS VENABLES I know it doesn't seem important but don't forget to get married!
(*ALEX goes*) I think your mother would like it

NELLIE (*after a moment's pause*) What an excitement Poor Evie She must be worn out

MRS VENABLES Oh, she enjoys it How long are you staying?

NELLIE I'd planned to stay a week But I had a letter from Arthur last night He wants me back

MRS VENABLES What for?

NELLIE He says he's missing me I think it's

a little mean I get no holidays at all A furnished house for the six of us in the summer ! I don't grudge him his trips abroad with his Conferences And he can't even let me have a week in town

MRS VENABLES Well, you would marry him

NELLIE I know and I'm not sorry, really Seeing those two go off like that, though, made me wonder if Alex realises what she's in for

[Enter CHRISTOPHER

CHRISTOPHER Can I come in ?

MRS VENABLES If you don't mind a lady's bedroom

CHRISTOPHER Eve told me to come up How are you, Aunt Lucy ? You look very ravishing

MRS VENABLES I am ! Have they gone ?

CHRISTOPHER No, but I thought I'd leave Eve alone with them for the last few minutes

MRS VENABLES What *you* wanted to get up at the crack of dawn for I can't imagine

[NELLIE goes to the window

(To NELLIE) Is anything happening ?

NELLIE Roland's helping Toby into the car Rose is out there I don't see Liz

CHRISTOPHER She's in the dining room She left Eve alone, too

MRS VENABLES Has Evie got a coat on ?

NELLIE No Nor a hat

MRS VENABLES She's mad She'll catch her death of cold Call out to her (*She goes to the window*)

CHRISTOPHER She's all right Leave her alone

NELLIE She's just kissing Alex good bye

[Enter MISS SPICER, drying her eyes

SPICER They're just going Oh, can you see them ? (*She joins NELLIE at the window*)

[CHRISTOPHER *has moved away and picked up the book of verse on MRS MILLWARD's bed table, where he stands reading it*

SPICER I think Mrs Millward's very wonderful If it were my daughter going away like that

NELLIE They're just off There they go !

[*They stand a moment watching and waving and there is a silence* MRS VENABLES *turns away*

MRS VENABLES Well, I think I'll go back to bed Good-bye, Christopher I expect we'll see you soon

CHRISTOPHER (*looking up from his book*) Of course, Aunt Lucy

MRS VENABLES (*to MISS SPICER*) Come along (*She goes out with MISS SPICER*)

NELLIE I'd better go down to Christine You're not going yet, are you ?

CHRISTOPHER Not yet

[NELLIE *goes out*

CHRISTOPHER *takes up the book again, opens it and sits reading it*

MRS MILLWARD *comes back She comes over to CHRISTOPHER, standing behind him, and reading over his shoulder She reads aloud the last two lines of the poem*

MRS MILLWARD (*reading*) ' You bend your head and wipe away a tear , Solitude walks one heavy step more near ' (*She moves away*) Have they left you all alone, Christopher ? It was sweet of you to come this morning

CHRISTOPHER I wanted to Has this hit you very badly, Eve ?

MRS MILLWARD (*reflectively*) I don't think so

CHRISTOPHER You're good at being lonely

MRS MILLWARD I'm not really lonely

CHRISTOPHER I always think of you as that

MRS MILLWARD That's where you make a mistake Loneliness means that there's some thing you want, some companionship you're looking for

CHRISTOPHER And you're not ?

MRS MILLWARD No

CHRISTOPHER Perhaps if, instead of loneliness, I called it solitude ?

MRS MILLWARD That's different

CHRISTOPHER Eve, couldn't I do something about that ? (*He puts his hand on her shoulder*)

MRS MILLWARD (*laying her hand on his*) No, Christopher It's sweet of you But that's something that just happens to one And there's a kind of peace in it, really That's what makes it different from loneliness Loneliness aches I believe you think of me as being unhappy I'm not, you know

CHRISTOPHER I think of you as being very lovely, Eve

MRS MILLWARD That's dear of you

CHRISTOPHER I've tried to let you know that Eve, wouldn't you marry me, let me help your solitude ?

MRS MILLWARD Christopher, I couldn't I'm terribly, terribly sorry, but I couldn't I know all that it would mean oh, to me far more than to you I like you You know that I'm deeply, deeply fond of you But marriage, and all it means, is something different That couldn't happen twice for me

CHRISTOPHER I wouldn't expect it to be the same

MRS MILLWARD Even so it just wouldn't

be possible I'm sorry You're not angry with me ?

CHRISTOPHER I've always known it, really

MRS MILLWARD You'll come and see me just the same ?

CHRISTOPHER Of course

MRS MILLWARD I love being with you

CHRISTOPHER And I with you Would you like me to get along now ?

MRS MILLWARD If you wouldn't mind

CHRISTOPHER May I come in this afternoon ?

MRS MILLWARD Please do

CHRISTOPHER Good bye, my dear (*He bends down and kisses her gently on the cheek and then goes out*)

[*MRS MILLWARD sits alone a moment She cries a very little*

MISS SPICER *comes in*

SPICER Mrs Venables says will you come in and talk to her, Mrs Millward dear

MRS MILLWARD All right I'll come in a moment Miss Spicer

[*MISS SPICER goes out*

MRS MILLWARD *sits another moment, then she rises, goes over to the dressing table and sits looking at the photograph of her husband She looks at it a long time*

(*Whispering*) Our girl's all right, Henry She's all right

[*She puts the photograph down and then quickly goes out of the room*

CURTAIN

